

434
TWO NEW SERIAL STORIES COMMENCE IN THIS NUMBER.

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GEORGE NORTON WENT STRAIGHT UP TO THE ORPHAN GIRL AND TOOK HER HAND.

THE TRIALS OF HERMIONE.

CHAPTER I.

Her name was Hermione, and she inherited it and much of her beauty from one of the proud ancestresses whose picture hung in the long gallery at Carlyon. She was a queenly, dazzling creature, with hair as black as the raven's wing, and dark intense blue eyes—the loveliest girl in all Wiltshire; and yet she had reached the age of twenty without possessing one single friend, except the careless old father, who, though he loved her well enough, after his own fashion, would not make a single sacrifice for her sake, and had ruined her prospects before ever she was born.

Hugh, Lord Carlyon, was fast, dissolute, and extravagant—so far in fact from being a model heir that his uncle had more than once threatened to disinherit him (the property was not entailed)—and finally died suddenly, leaving a will so

ambiguous that it speedily became the cause of a lawsuit between the new Lord Carlyon and his first cousin, Rupert Carlyon, a colonel in the army, and already a distinguished soldier.

It was what the lawyers call “a very nice question” whether the will could stand. No one doubted the testator's frame of mind. Everyone knew he had fully intended to cut off Hugh without even the proverbial shilling, but he had chosen to make the will himself, and through want of technical knowledge he had made it possible for it to be read two ways, conveying, of course, totally different meanings.

The case was being fought desperately, when it entered the brain of one of the counsel employed that it was just the sort of matter to be arranged “by mutual consent.” If it dragged out its course it would leave Colonel Carlyon either a ruined man (if he failed to establish his claim) or else burdened with a very heavy bill of costs, since Lord Carlyon frankly admitted if he lost the case he had not a penny to pay the costs. So the eminent barrister, in a very dis-

interested spirit, proposed the following compromise to the colonel,—

Lord Carlyon, he pointed out, was forty-five, and unmarried. If the estate came to him he would probably make ducks and drakes of it in no time; but there was such a grave chance of the will being pronounced legal and his losing everything, that he might feel inclined to consent to an act of settlement, giving him Carlyon and its revenues for life, but entailing both inalienably on the Colonel and his heirs.

Rupert Carlyon and his wife discussed the question seriously. It was a distant certainty, instead of a present possibility, but the Colonel was not ambitious. He had enough money to bring up his family in simple comfort, and he was ready to sacrifice a great deal for the sake of his eldest son then a small boy at Eton; so in the end Mr. Skinner, Q.C., was authorised to “make an offer” to the other side.

Shorn of legal verbiage it ran thus: “Lord Carlyon was to take possession of the estate and its revenues, as life tenant. At his death everything

would revert to his cousin Rupert, or the latter's eldest son. The whole costs of the lawsuit on both sides to be paid out of the estate."

Hugh, Lord Carlyon, swore dreadfully when he heard the proposal, but his lawyer told him "he was a great deal better off than he could have expected, and that unless he was a fool he would close with it at once."

Not being a fool Lord Carlyon signed the deed, reflecting that at least he secured himself ten thousand a-year for life, and though there was a clause in the deed stipulating the property was to be kept in good condition—repairs executed and so on—he saw his way to what he and his boon companions called "a high old time," and considering his facility for spending, perhaps it was as well he was restrained from anticipating his income or encumbering the property now he must be a rich man till the day of his death.

But Lord Carlyon was just the sort of man to do the thing least expected of him, and three months after the close of the lawsuit he married a very pretty girl whom he met on his travels, an orphan governess with no one to "stand up" for her rights, her employers, simple, kindly people, thinking it the height of good fortune for Lucy Fielding to marry a nobleman, and never troubling to inquire what provision would be secured to her at his death.

But their negligence did not hurt her. Poor pretty Lucy needed neither jointure nor provision, since she died on the first anniversary of her wedding, leaving a very unwelcome baby as a legacy to her husband.

No one wanted that baby, her father least of all, and for the first three years of her life she led a most neglected existence; then Lord Carlyon, paying a flying visit to his country seat, was struck with her infantile beauty, and from that hour he was—as far as an intensely selfish man could be—devoted to her. He never cared to spend much time in England; an agent managed his estate, which (as required by the deed of settlement) was well-cared for, and Lord Carlyon roamed from one city to another, taking his fill of enjoyment in each, and spending money right royally, even for a man with ten thousand a-year. When Hermione was sixteen he embarked in a hazardous speculation, which, collapsing, landed him in such heavy difficulties, that there was no resource for him but to settle down quietly on his own estate till things "righted themselves."

He meant to spend nothing; but economy was not in Lord Carlyon's nature. Besides the heavy subsidy he had to pay annually to his creditors he managed to get enough money for his minor pleasures. He was always going to save a fortune for Hermione, only he never took the initial step of beginning, and so when he died suddenly on her twentieth birthday there was nothing in the world for his only child but the few articles of furniture specially bought for her use, the remnant of her last quarter's dress allowance, and a little jewellery, bought for her mother during the peer's brief year of wedded life.

And the truth came on Hermione like a thunderbolt. The foolish old father had never told her of the deed of settlement drawn up before she was born, which signed away her rights for ever.

He had purposely prevented her from forming an intimacy with any one likely to enlighten her, and it was only after her father's funeral that Hermione learned Carlyon and his broad acres could not be hers.

"I can't believe it! I won't believe it!" cried the girl, passionately; "my father would never have signed away my home and left me a beggar."

The lawyer drew his breath quickly.

"It was long before your birth," he said, gravely, "nearly two years, in fact, and at that time Lord Carlyon was not contemplating marriage."

"And these people, this Colonel Carlyon, how did he come to take such a mean advantage of my father?"

Mr. Norton sighed. He did not understand women, being an old bachelor. His clients, too, were mostly of the sterner sex; but he did wish with all his heart the task of explaining things to Hermione had fallen on anyone else.

"Colonel Carlyon was the soul of honour," he

said, gravely, "there is no use in opening a subject closed more than twenty years ago. I believe myself that if Lord Carlyon had fought the case to the bitter end he would have been a ruined man; instead of which he has lived in luxury for twenty-two years, and has received from the property over two hundred thousand pounds."

Hermione shrugged her shoulders.

"I should have thought as he profited so much by my father's death Colonel Carlyon might have condescended to attend his funeral, and at least show him so much respect."

"My dear young lady, Colonel Carlyon has been dead for years. The estate and title both pass to his eldest son, who is now in Australia. If Mr. Carlyon started the day my cablegram reached him he could not be in England for six weeks."

"And this is his house? I am actually here on sufferance?"

"I am quite sure your kinsman would make you welcome to remain as long as suited you," said Mr. Norton, gravely; "in fact, I have had a letter from his mother begging that I will express her sympathy at your loss, and suggesting you should stay with her until your plans are settled."

"My plans," said Hermione, drearily, "I haven't got any plans. I am like the steward in the Bible. I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed; but this much I know. If I were starving I would not accept help or hospitality from those who have usurped my birthright."

"Will you come and stop with us?" asked Mr. Norton, real kindness beneath his very blunt manner. "My sister and I are not fashionable folks; but we would do our best to make you welcome."

"Thank you. Will you tell me just this one thing! How long have I a right to stay here? You said just now Mr. Carlyon could not be in England under six weeks."

"I am quite sure that none of his relations will disturb you in possession of Carlyon," said the lawyer, gravely; "but you cannot live here even for six weeks without some considerable expense."

She hesitated.

"I think I understand. You mean the sooner I leave the better!"

"For your own sake, I think so. Why not take a fortnight to think over things, and then decide on your next step? If you would like to dispose of your own special possessions among the furniture, they can, I am sure, be bought in for the new owner of Carlyon; and the small sum standing to your father's credit at the Bank is certainly yours."

"Yes," she said, after a pause, "I will sell everything; I will take nothing away with me but my own clothes. If I do this, how much money shall I have?"

"Roughly speaking, three hundred pounds;" and the lawyer thought it was little enough for a girl bred up in luxury.

Hermione put one hand to her head to still the pain that raged there.

"I know you mean to be kind," she said, simply, "but I can't thank you, I am too unhappy. It is all so new and strange to me; and it is only a week to day since I lost papa. I don't believe any father was better loved than mine, and he was taken from me suddenly, without an hour's warning."

Mr. Norton was deeply moved.

"Your troubles are, indeed, heavy," he said, gently. "I can only tell you that my best help and sympathy are at your service. If you will write to me when you have made any plans, I will come down to consult about them gladly; and I can send you a cheque to-morrow, if you keep to your intention of parting with the articles we mentioned."

"Yes, I would rather do so. I shall want nothing to remind me of Carlyon—my beautiful, lost home!"

As Mr. Norton rose to go a thought seemed to strike him.

"Mr. Clifford, your father's secretary, is anxious to say good-bye to you before he leaves Carlyon. Will you see him to-morrow?"

"To-night," she answered;

"this has been a day of misery, I may as well cram all the disagreeables I can into it."

"There is no occasion for you to see Clifford, unless you like," said the lawyer, gravely. "Indeed he had been with Lord Carlyon such a short time, I considered his request rather a liberty."

"I should like to see him," replied Hermione. "My father took a great fancy to him."

It was more than the lawyer had done. When three months before Lord Carlyon engaged James Clifford as his private secretary, Mr. Norton had ventured to remonstrate with him on the step; his advice being neglected, had not disposed him to like the young man any better. He could find no particular fault with the secretary, who was young, handsome, and possessed of very pleasant manners; but there was a certain mystery about his antecedents which annoyed Mr. Norton, who always declared Lord Carlyon had picked the young fellow up at an hotel for no other reason than that he talked well and knew how to play billiards.

Of Mr. Clifford's former calling, of his relations (if he possessed any), of his future aims, no one in Westshire ever heard; it was as though he had dropped from the sky, and had come to stay.

The short autumn day was closing in when a tap came at the door of Hermione's boudoir. Mr. Norton had been gone some time, and she had fallen into a reverie, hardly rousing from it when the servant brought in lights and drew the curtains.

James Clifford found her leaning back in a huge arm-chair; her beautiful dark head pillowed on one of her rounded arms. There was something in her desolate attitude, in the very abandonment of her grief, which for a moment touched his heart.

Only for a moment, though, for James Clifford was selfish to the core.

He was a very handsome man, and his pleasant, *débutant* manner made him very popular wherever he went. In the three months he had been at Carlyon he had made plenty of acquaintances, and now he was staying with one of these; being unwilling, as he put it, to leave the neighbourhood until he had followed his late employer to the grave.

At first eight people often took Clifford for an actor; his curly, chestnut hair, dark eyes and lashes, smooth-shaven face and a certain picturesque style of costume, which he much affected, all suggested the idea, but really it was an injury to an honourable profession. James Clifford acted in a *sense* in that he was always trying to pose as something superior to what he was; but he had never studied the histrionic art of Shakespeare and Garrick, and probably never would.

He went straight up to the orphan girl and took her hand; he raised it to his lips with every token of respect, yet conveying something warmer than respect by his manner, and then he said, gently,—

"I have been so sorry for you."

The beautiful eyes softened as they had never done all through her interview with good, blunt George Norton, as she replied,—

"You loved him, too."

"Yes," replied the secretary, adroitly, "he was so kind to me. I felt as if I had lost the best friend I ever had when I heard he was gone."

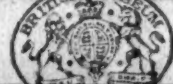
A silence. Clifford looked at Hermione sympathetically with his fine dark eyes, then, as she did not speak, he went on,—

"And now I have heard other news, which has filled me with honest indignation and deep dismay, that you, Lord Carlyon's daughter and rightful heiress are to be expelled from your home to make way for an usurper. My blood boils when I think of your wrongs."

This was language after Hermione's own heart, poor foolish girl. This hot partisanship seemed to her better worth than all Mr. Norton's real kindness.

"I suppose the new man (I can't give him my father's title yet), is in his rights," she said, sadly; "but it is a terrible surprise for me."

"You will have to leave here soon," breathed



Clifford; "you will not stay to welcome the usurper."

"I shall leave as soon as possible. His mother had the impertinence to ask me to stay with her, but, of course, that is impossible."

"Quite," agreed the ex-secretary; "but, forgive me, what will you do?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. There will be a little money—about three hundred pounds. Perhaps I shall spend it on being trained for the concert-hall stage. My voice is the only marketable thing about me."

"It sounds profanation," said Clifford, hotly, "that you should sing for money."

"But one must live," objected Hermione. "And three hundred pounds won't last for ever."

"But it is not your place to work—delicate, refined, used to every luxury. I cannot bear to think that you should toil for bread."

"There is no alternative," she said, gravely.

"Of course, I may decide to be a governess or a companion, but I think myself my voice is my best chance. Anyway, by some means or other I must earn my bread."

"There is an alternative," said James Clifford, slowly, "if I dared to tell you of it, Hermione. I am not rich or great, but I have a strong arm to work for you. I have loved you ever since the first moment I saw your face; but while I thought you the heiress of Carlyon, I would never have told you of my devotion. I am poor, but I have my pride, and I could not brook being thought a fortune-hunter."

"But now, my love, my darling, the blow which has made you homeless has set me free to speak. Only be my wife, Hermione, and I will work for you with all my might, and never rest until I have won a position for you not unworthy of Lord Carlyon's daughter!"

She was silent. An intense surprise was her only feeling. She did not love this man; in fact, of love and lovers Hermione Carlyon knew absolutely nothing. She had been devoted to her father. She had worshipped her home. These two objects had filled her heart to the exclusion of all others, and now that she had lost both at one blow, she was like a rudderless bark at the mercy of every wind which blew. But if she did not love Mr. Clifford, at least she liked him very much, and her father had trusted him. He was the only man she had been permitted to see much of, and the fact that he was linked with her old home-life, gave him a strong attraction for her, and he must be disinterested since he had never breathed a word of his wishes for her happier days, but had waited till her darkest hour to offer her all he had.

It never entered Hermione's head to ask how her lover proposed to support her. No girl of twenty was ever more ignorant of money matters than Hermione Carlyon. She believed (though she could not have told whence she derived the idea), Mr. Clifford had a trifle of his own, and if she had thought at all about the subject (which she had not), she would have supposed he would seek another secretaryship, only a non-resident one, since such posts are not usually accompanied by board and lodging for two people instead of one.

At last she spoke.

"I don't love you," said the sad, beautiful daughter of the Carlyons, "something tells me that I don't; but I like you very much, and I can never forget that father trusted you. If you can be content with such affection as I have to give, I will be your wife, though" and she smiled a little sadly, "your friends will think you are making a terribly bad match."

"Never mind my friends, it is no concern of theirs. Hermione, my darling, will you really consent, will you leave Carlyon as my wife?"

"Oh, no," and her voice was full of shocked protest. "I cannot marry you yet. Why, my father was only buried to-day, and—"

But he interrupted her.

"You are alone in the world, dear; that is why I am in such a hurry to claim your promise. And, Hermione, there is something else; you are a minor, and your father having left no will, the new Lord Carlyon, as your next male relative,

may claim to be in some sort your guardian. How if he forbids our marriage?"

"He would not dare, it is no concern of his."

Clifford smiled.

"The law might uphold his claim, and a wealthy nobleman might not care for his kinswoman to marry a man who had little but his love and his work to offer her. In six weeks time, dear, your kinsman will be in England; if we are not married first I fear he will do his best to part us."

A dead silence. Hermione was visibly impressed by Clifford's arguments, but yet every instinct of her nature was against being married in this unceremonious haste.

Her lover continued.

"I think if your father could make his wishes known to us, he would say he would rather think of you as safe in the care of a man who loved you than at the mercy of a guardian you hated."

A long, long pause. Then the girl spoke.

"I will marry you before the new Lord Carlyon"—she brought out the name by an effort,— "reaches England, but not here; I simply couldn't be married here, where every creature knows my father was buried to-day."

Unconsciously she was playing into Clifford's hands. His face grew brighter.

"Be it as you please, my darling. I am going to London to-morrow; perhaps it would be better if you joined me there in a fortnight or less, and we were married on your arrival. That would give me a little time to prepare a nest for my wife; and as everyone here is expecting you to leave Carlyon shortly, they would look on your journey as a natural result of your father's death, and there will be no occasion to take anyone into our confidence."

He held her in his arms and kissed her very fondly; he was proud of his conquest. Never had he dreamed six months ago that he would ever marry a nobleman's daughter; little had he dared to hope, when he first saw the beautiful Miss Carlyon, that such a bride could ever be for him.

When he was gone Hermione felt a little more desolate; surely, she told herself, she must love him, if his absence made such a difference to her; and then, after a miserable attempt at dinner, worn out by grief and emotion, Hermione went to bed and dreamed that her sorrows were all a terrible mistake, and her father was really alive and well, while Carlyon was his and would be here after him.

James Clifford did not once figure in her dream, but for all that it was a very happy one, and a smile parted Hermione's lips as she awoke. Alas, the smile faded as she came back from dreamland to the hard stern realities of life and remembered her troubles.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL CARLYON's wife had been much younger than her husband, but she was some years over fifty now and had been a widow for many years.

Her large family were scattered; some of them had been claimed by death, two fair girls who had faded beneath a southern sky, and a soldier boy who died when his first uniform was fresh and bright in one of those little frontier wars of which we hear so little, but which consume many of our troops.

Still, Mrs. Carlyon was by no means lonely; one of her daughters had married a doctor and settled in Brighton; the eldest girl lived at home with her mother, and of the sons one was a clergyman with a pleasant country rectory, and the eldest, Denis, was in Australia, where he had gone about a year ago, partly to visit an old Eton chum who had a sheep farm in New South Wales, partly to pick up materials for a story of colonial life he was then writing.

Denis was thirty-three, and for some years had added to his income most successfully by his pen. For the rest he had three hundred a year, not a liberal private income for the heir of Carlyon, but then the Colonel had a widow and several other children to provide for, and expecting Denis

to come in for the family honours much sooner than he did, the father's first thought had been for the girls.

Mrs. Carlyon had a nice house at Brighton,—three maids and a page; she could order a carriage for a drive whenever she fancied such diversion, and she always had a margin to her income to help other people.

Kate Carlyon was the old maid of the family, but a spinster of the modern type not of the old. With her classes and her meetings, her lectures and her clubs, Miss Carlyon was quite as much engrossed as if she had had half-a-dozen children; and her mother thought sometimes that Janet, her youngest daughter, and Dr. Nairn's wife, was really more of a companion to her than Kate.

When the wonderful news came that Denis was really Lord Carlyon at last, Kate dismissed the matter with a brief "he'll have to come home and settle down;" but the mother was longing to "talk over things," and found Janet far more sympathetic.

Mrs. Nairn was only twenty-two and very warm-hearted. Her husband idolised her, but somehow, though two small children claimed (and received) a great deal of care, Janet always had leisure to enter into everyone's interests, and to sympathise with them as heartily as though she had no personal joys and griefs.

"Of course it's nice for Denis to come in for Carlyon," she said, frankly; "but, mother, I do pity that poor Hermione."

"So do I," confessed Mrs. Carlyon. "Mr. Norton writes that she was devoted to her father. And that's not all, Janet, she has never heard of the deed of settlement, and believes herself heiress of Carlyon."

"Denis would be quite capable of giving up the estate to her," said Mrs. Nairn, laughing.

"Quite, only he can't. It's settled on him and his children; but Janet, I have a plan."

"Your plans are always delightful, mother, What is it?"

"I haven't dared to tell Kate," explained the widow, who stood much in awe of her clever, eldest daughter, "but you are different, Nettie."

"There's nothing I love so much as making plans," said Janet, "and I do believe I have guessed yours. As Denis can't possibly give up Carlyon to Hermione, even if he wished it, you think it would be nice if they shared it!"

Mrs. Carlyon nodded.

"Only I had not got so far as that. I thought it would be so nice if Hermione could come and stop with me till her plans were settled. Then of course Denis would see her, and they might take a fancy to each other."

"I should invite her," said Mrs. Nairn, decidedly. "Putting Denis out of the question, she is an orphan, and we are her nearest relations."

"I would write at once—only there's Kate."

Mrs. Nairn quite understood her mother's awe of Kate. She had shared it till her marriage.

"Well, mother dear, you need not tell Kate until Hermione has actually accepted your invitation. Then of course you can't take it back, however much our eldest objects, and Kate is far too good at heart to make any guest uncomfortable when they are here."

"She could have the spare room, and that all on the stairs for a little study if she wanted to be alone," went on Mrs. Carlyon, thinking of Hermione.

"And if she really has no money at all, mother, don't you think Denis would settle a nice little income on her. He'd never miss two or three hundred a-year now, and then she would feel independent and not obliged to stay with us longer than she liked."

"Janet," said her mother affectionately. "You are such a help. Now, Kate always stares at me as if I were mad, when I tell her any little plan of mine. She is much too clever for her poor old mother."

"And for her poor sister too. But, mother, David says Kate is one of the most intellectual women he ever met, and that some day she will set the Thames on fire, so I suppose that really we ought to be proud of her."

"Very proud," agreed Mrs. Carlyon, warmly, though in secret she much preferred Janet's

great warm heart to Kate's broad intellect, "and so we are."

Janet and her mother made one or two attempts at a letter to Hermione, but they were hampered by not knowing if she had yet been told of the old deed which cut her off from the Carlyon property, and as this made their task very difficult, in the end they addressed the letter to Mr. Norton, and only sent a message to Hermione.

The day after Lord Carlyon's funeral, Mr. Norton arrived in Harley-gardens. Fortunately (at least her mother thought so), Kate was out, but Janet happened to have dropped in, so the lawyer had two very interested auditors to his account of his interview with the refractory daughter of his late client.

"After your kindness I did not like to write just the bald fact that Miss Hermione refused your invitation," he said, frankly, "so I ran down to tell you all about her. It's one of the saddest tales I ever heard. Her father actually let her grow up believing herself his heiress, and yet never troubled to save a sixpence for her."

"Saying was not in his nature," commented Mrs. Carlyon. "Mr. Norton, please be frank. I gather from you that this poor girl looks on us as her enemies and despoilers."

"I am afraid so."

"And I should so like to help her, but I don't see how to manage it," said Mrs. Carlyon, thoughtfully. "If I went to her she might misunderstand my visit, and imagine I was in a hurry to remind her Carlyon was my son's house and no longer hers."

"That is just what she would think," said Mr. Norton, "and yet no creature ever more needed help and kindness. You may be thinking her a jealous, bad-tempered girl, but I assure you she has a large generous heart if only one can get at it. In her father's lifetime she was just like a living sunbeam. It was just like him to keep the truth from her. He could not bear to see her vexed or sad; and so, to spare himself unpleasantness, he let the news come on her as a sudden blow in the hour of her greatest misery."

"Has she any relations on her mother's side?" asked Janet. "Who was Lady Carlyon?"

"She was the orphan of an officer in the army, and had been brought up in a school for soldiers' daughters. She had just left it and taken her first situation as a governess when Lord Carlyon met her. I never heard of any living creature belonging to her, poor thing!"

"Then we are the only people Hermione has any claim on!" remarked Mrs. Nairn. "I do wish she would make friends with us!"

"What are her plans?" asked the widow.

"I don't think she has any. There will be about three hundred pounds for her; and of course she can live on that for some time. I fancy she will go to London. An old governess of hers has started a boarding-house there, and I think Hermione will stay with her for awhile. When she has left Carlyon, and had time to realise that your son's claim on it is simply his just right, I hope she will be more amenable to reason. I hope she will give me her address, and then, possibly, you would call on her."

And Mrs. Carlyon promised that she would. She seemed to the lawyer an unusually kind-hearted woman, for even the ungracious answer her invitation had met with, did not make her lose her interest in her young relative.

Mrs. Nairn must have been thinking of her mother's "plan," for when the lawyer was at lunch with them, she suddenly inquired,—

"Has Hermione a lover?"

"Oh, dear, no!" was the prompt and reassuring reply. "Not the ghost of one. Her father kept her from any close intimacies. He always told me he was saving up to give her a season in town, and did not care for her to go out in Westshire until she had been presented; but I fancy myself he had another reason. If any honourable man had proposed for her he would have had to explain her real position."

"Well, she is only twenty," said Mrs. Carlyon, cheerfully, "so she has plenty of time for lovers in the future. And, poor girl! at any rate she is safe from the pursuit of fortune hunters."

Mr. Norton made another journey to Carlyon,

but Hermione did not confide her plans to him. She said, proudly, that she proposed to leave Carlyon on the last of November, so "those people" could take possession as soon after as they pleased; and that she should probably reside in London.

"I suppose you will go to Miss Withers!" remarked Mr. Norton; "I know she has opened a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and you would be happier with her than with strangers."

"I shall never be happy again."

"Will you give me Miss Withers' address?" asked Mr. Norton, assuming from her silence he was right as to her destination. "I may want to write to you, you know."

"Her address is 20, Duchess Mansions, Bloomsbury," replied Hermione, indifferently. "I believe she is succeeding wonderfully well."

"It is two or three years since she left you. I suppose you have corresponded since?"

"Not very regularly."

Mr. Norton tried another theme.

"I ran against your father's secretary in the Strand the other day. Have you any idea what he is doing?"

Hermione lifted her eyebrows.

"I suppose he is seeking a similar post to the one he filled here. Papa thought most highly of Mr. Clifford."

"I am afraid he was deceived in him. I never liked the fellow, he was so mysterious."

But this was too much for "the fellow's" promised wife.

"My father was never mistaken in his judgments," said Hermione, passionately; "he lived in close intimacy with Mr. Clifford for months, while you have seen him three or four times for perhaps half an hour. How can you pass sentence on him?"

"I don't, my dear, I don't," said the lawyer, just in the tone one argues with a spoiled child; "but all the same, thought is free, and I never did like James Clifford."

Decidedly Hermione had not treated Mr. Norton with much courtesy, but yet the old lawyer had a real liking and pity for the orphan girl, and it was this which made him go straight to 20, Duchess Mansions, on leaving his office on the last day of November, instead of seeking the alighted ease of his own fireside.

"Has Miss Carlyon arrived?"

The neat maid looked surprised.

"No lady of that name is expected here, sir, I am sure."

Mr. Norton looked perplexed, then scribbling a line on his card, he asked the girl to take it to her mistress. The girl returned promptly,—

"Miss Withers would like to see you in her own sitting-room, please, sir."

This was (as is the case with most boarding-house keepers) only a slip at the end of the hall. Miss Withers, a cherry-buxom personage of fifty, shook hands warmly with the lawyer, whom she well remembered.

"So glad to see you, Mr. Norton; but there's some mistake. Miss Carlyon is not coming here."

"I saw her three days ago, and she certainly gave me this address. You know, I suppose, that her father is dead, and Carlyon passes to the next male heir?"

"I know," said Miss Withers. "I wrote to Hermione as soon as I saw Lord Carlyon's death in the paper, and I heard from her yesterday, only just a few lines saying that she was leaving her dear old home for ever."

"And did she make no reference to coming here?" asked the lawyer.

"None whatever. She expressly said her movements were uncertain, but as soon as she had a settled home she would send her address and ask me to go and see her. I'll confess I was just a little hurt, Mr. Norton. I thought she might have come here. I'd have given her the very best my house could offer, just for love's sake, and you know it would have been an advertisement for me to have a real Honourable staying here."

"So it would."

"But, after all, Hermione herself is our first thought," said the kindly splinter. "Why

should she tell you she was coming here when she had no such thought?"

She had not told him so in so many words, but she had certainly let him infer it.

"I don't know, but she is desperately set against the present Lord Carlyon; she may have feared if I had the address I should give it to her relations."

"Do you mean that she is actually alone in London among strangers?"

"I fear so."

"But her father kept her such a child in all essential matters, I don't believe Hermione had the faintest idea of the cost of every day things, of what she could buy for a sovereign or a penny."

"She will learn soon enough now," said Mr. Norton, grimly enough, though he was deeply touched and really anxious about the wilful girl. "Unfortunately I paid over every penny of the money there was for her when I saw her last week. For some reason she asked me to have it changed into notes. That poor girl is alone in London with every shilling she possesses in the world in her own keeping, at the mercy of any swindling adventurers she meets."

Mr. Norton went home worried greatly about his old client's wilful daughter; but on the second morning after his interview with Miss Withers his dismay was increased tenfold, for in the first column of the *Times* he read the following announcement:—

"On November 30th, at St. Ursula's, Piccadilly, James Clifford, of London, to Hermione, only child of the late Lord Carlyon, of Carlyon Westshire."

Mr. Norton pushed the paper aside with a groan. It seemed to him that Hermione had gone straight to her own misery, for he had never disliked and distrusted any man more than he disliked and distrusted the handsome adventurer who was now her husband.

(To be continued.)

THE UNCLE'S SECRET.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

It was seven o'clock on a warm June evening. The shadows of early twilight were just beginning to gather over the hills and vales of Mayborough as the shriek of the evening express train, which had been due at the station of Dunchester some twenty minutes previous, sounded shrilly in the distance.

A young and lovely girl paced impatiently to and fro on the platform, keeping well in the shadow of the building, casting anxious glances in the direction of the on-coming train, then back fearfully to a large stone building standing like a grim sentinel on the brow of an adjacent hill.

Another moment and the panting train had dashed up to the station.

With a glad cry and another fearful glance at the stone house on the hill the young girl sprang swiftly on to the step, and stood timidly at the door of the compartment.

Several young gentlemen, who had settled resolutely back in their seats and turned their heads and stared out of the window when an old lady entered the carriage at a previous station, took but a single glance at the slender girl in the door-way, dressed in a natty suit of navy blue trimmed with white braid, and at the pretty, dimpled face half shaded by the sailor hat that was crushed down over her brown curls, and immediately each young fellow sprang to his feet with a flush, a smile, and a bow to proffer the pretty young stranger his seat.

No less than five of them! No wonder the young girl was slightly embarrassed and bewildered.

The train gave a sudden lurch forward, and she took the seat nearest her, with a very demure "Thank you, sir," and a drooping of the white lids over her brown eyes.

Placing her luggage in the rack overhead the young man took the unoccupied seat beside her, mentally wondering who she was, where she was going, and why such a pretty young girl was permitted to travel alone and at night.

Meanwhile, the train rushed on through the fast-gathering darkness, and as the lights from the large stone house on the hill vanished from her sight, the young girl hid her pretty face in her handkerchief, and the slender form shook with emotion like a quivering leaf in a gale.

A thrill of intense pity stirred the heart of the young man seated beside her.

His fair, handsome face flushed. Ah, if he could but do something—say something to comfort her!

In his great sympathy, his eager curiosity to know the cause of her grief, and his impulsiveness, he threw prudence to the winds.

"You are in trouble," he said, kindly. "Can I, a stranger, help you in any way?"

He was amazed at the face she raised from the folds of the snowy handkerchief; it was fairly convulsed with laughter, and the merry brown eyes were sparkling with suppressed mirth.

She saw the look of wonder and astonishment in the handsome face turned toward her, and again the brown curly head and sailor hat were half hidden in the folds of the snowy handkerchief with a burst of laughter.

"You must excuse me, sir," she faltered at length, blushing as red as a rose. "I am sorry that I disturbed you, but it was so very funny, I—I could not keep from laughing; indeed I could not, though I tried my best."

He looked down into her face and saw that she could not be over sixteen or seventeen years of age at most.

And he judged, too, that she was a school-girl, from the two books—English grammar and history—she held tightly clasped in her slim little white hands.

Of course he was more than anxious to know what amused her so. Her answer had piqued his curiosity; but he was too thorough a gentleman to venture to inquire.

Perhaps she read the question in his eyes, for she went on, with all the thoughtlessness of a school-girl:

"As the train moved out of the station at Duncheater I saw lights flashing from room to room in the large stone house on the brow of the hill; then I knew that my night had been discovered. It's a boarding-school. They would not let me come home to spend the vacation, but I would not stay at the school"—this with a defiant toss of the brown curls and the roguish dimples deepening in the rose-pink cheeks—"so I ran away. I'm going home to take them by surprise. I can imagine the terrible anger and consternation on the principal's face as those lights flashed from window to window. I knew she was searching for me, and I safely whirling away beyond her reach, so I couldn't help laughing, it was so very funny," she added, apologetically.

And as though the explanation quite excused her mirth, without waiting for his reply, she turned resolutely toward the window and stared for a time in utter silence.

This evidently did not quite suit the young gentleman beside her.

"What a pity it is that I'm going only as far as Oakdale," he said to himself, regretfully. "If she were not going much farther I might see her safely to the end of her journey—she would never know."

Again the thought occurred to him that she was decidedly too young and pretty, and by far too innocent, to be travelling alone at night.

"Are you going much farther?" he asked, at length.

The young girl started and turned round.

"I'm going to Oakdale," she said.

He could scarcely repress a start of pleased surprise.

"Oakdale!" he repeated; "why, that is just where I am going. I have not been there for a year or more." He longed to make certain inquiries, but prudence restrained him. "She would not know them," he argued with himself. Yet he asked, abruptly: "In what part of the

village do you reside, may I ask—in the valley, or on the hill? I used to live there, but I do not remember having met you there."

Her answer literally took his breath away.

"My home is at Lexmore Hall, on the hill," she answered; "and the reason that you have not seen me is, I suppose, because I have not lived there for many months." He was listening with an intensely interested face, and she went on, heedlessly. "Major Lexmore, the master of Lexmore, has been my guardian ever since I can remember. He sent me to school at Duncheater, and I have passed all my vacations with my aunt, who lived near Duncheater. Last year she died, so I had nowhere else to go when vacation came, unless I went to Lexmore Hall. My guardian wrote me I was to remain at the school this vacation; but I would not do it. I wanted to come home and help to celebrate the birthday of the major's son, poor Harold Lexmore."

"Why do you say, 'poor Harold Lexmore!'" asked the young man, flushing hotly, then turning a shade paler.

"If you live in Oakdale you ought to know why," returned the girl. Then, with a glance of curiosity, she asked, "Do you know Mr. Harold Lexmore, sir?"

"Better, perhaps, than anyone else," he answered, with a touch of bitterness in his voice. "Yet why do you speak of him as 'poor Harold Lexmore!'" he demanded, somewhat haughtily, his fine keen blue eyes flashing.

"Because I feel very sorry for him," returned the girl, slowly. "I cried when they told me the story of how his father sent for him the evening after he returned home from college, how the major stormed and raged at something he had done, and, vowing he should never forgive him, turned him out of the house."

"Do you know—did you learn what the quarrel was about? Did Major Lexmore ever say anything to you about it?" asked the young man, with intense interest.

She shook her head.

"He will not speak about his son," she said. "His cousin, Miss Winnie Kinder, has been at the Hall a long time, trying to win the major's forgiveness for his sin, but his heart is like marble; he harshly forbid her to mention the name 'Harold Lexmore' in his house under pain of banishment."

The young man sighed heavily, then his fine blue eyes lighted up again with a sudden thought.

"Major Lexmore's heart cannot be altogether hardened against his son, for you see he evidently continues to recognize his birthday."

"I hope you will not think me impertinent if I inquire your name," he said, after a pause, and with a winning smile; "and as poor Mr. Harold's friend, to thank you for speaking so kindly of such a scapegrace and thinking so well of him."

"If you are his friend why do you call him a scapegrace behind his back?" demanded the girl.

Her brown eyes flashed resentfully, and she looked him straight in the face.

"Oh, did I?" he answered, with a confused laugh. "I really was not aware of it; pray forgive the expression."

She was slightly mollified.

"You have not told me your name," he said, hurriedly, as the train slackened and stopped suddenly at Oakdale, and he gathered up her books for her.

"My name is Constance Calver, but everyone calls me Connie—only that, because I like it best."

"Thank you," he said; but Connie noticed, with a thrill of disappointment, that this young man, quite the handsomest she had ever seen in the sixteen years of her girlhood, seemed to have no inclination to give his own in return. Connie's pride was piqued.

So, when he held out his white hand to assist her to alight from the train she busied her two little hands in the draperies of her dress, affected not to see his offer of assistance, and sprang down the steps lightly without his aid.

The young man smiled at this dash of spirit; he knew quite well what prompted it.

He was five-and-twenty, and at that age nowa-

days young men are worldly wise, or, at least, we gather the impression that they are.

"Shall I see you as far as the park gate?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Connie, with dignity; "I am much obliged to you, but I can do very nicely without you."

He raised his hat with a bow, which she admitted to her girlish heart was perfectly princely. Yet without deigning him another glance Connie wheeled round and walked proudly along the path that led down the valley and over the hills to Lexmore Hall.

There was no moon, not even the friendly light of the stars to guide her, and Connie's heart quaked with a strange, undefinable fear for a moment, and she really did wish that she had said "yes" to the handsome young stranger who had asked so courteously "to see her safe to the park gate," although the stern warning of the principal so oft repeated still rang in her ears. "Never let me hear of any of the young ladies of this school making or cultivating chance acquaintances. Remember, new acquaintances should be made only through the formula of an introduction of some common friend."

Yet, all the same, a pair of laughing blue eyes and a handsome face had disturbed the peace and quiet of Connie's life.

The world would never be quite the same to her again.

Poor little Connie! If she had been versed in the ways of romantic fate and love she would have known that her heart had gone out to the handsome stranger at first sight.

Yet, with the dawning of love in a girl's heart, the tragedy of life begins, for love is either a blessing or a curse.

The handsome young stranger watched the slim, girlish figure disappearing in the darkness.

"It might be as well to follow at a safe distance and see that no harm befalls her," he told himself, putting the thought into execution. "Major Lexmore's ward!" he mused. "Is this the irony of fate! I should hate her, I suppose; but I don't—quite. I am startled, bewildered."

Then with a little reckless laugh that certainly had no mirth in it he quickened his pace, remembering that he had charged himself with the duty of seeing the young lady safe to the gate of Lexmore Hall.

"Yes, I suppose I should hate her, but I don't quite," he repeated. "I have great reason—I—"

The sentence was never finished, for through the trees a quick, sharp cry, as of someone in distress floated back to him. His heart gave a quick throb; he knew it was Connie's voice.

CHAPTER II.

CONNIE had sped quickly along upon leaving the station, choosing the shortest route to Lexmore Hall, which led through the valley by way of the bridge.

The wind moaned through the trees dying away in low, fitful sobs over the hills. Connie quickened her pace, her footfalls making no sound on the grass-grown path.

She reached the bridge in safety, and when she had traversed half its length the moon struggled out from behind the net-work of black clouds which had enveloped it, and shone down for a moment upon the sleeping earth.

And in that moment, by its dim light, Connie saw, standing scarcely ten feet from her, the figure of a man.

He was leaning both arms on the railing, gazing down into the waters below. And the dark, swarthy face, turned partially towards her, although young and rather dissipated looking, was singularly handsome with a coarse kind of beauty.

Connie stood quite still, wondering whether it would be best to pass him, or to retreat and go round by the other road.

While she stood there irresolute, he glanced up and saw her. Then it was too late to retreat, and Connie advanced.

He watched her with an evil smile on his face

—a terrible smile—that, brave as she was, made her shudder.

"Great Comar! what a little beauty!" he ejaculated; and she recognised him by his voice at once.

He had been Major Lexmore's secretary up to a month or so previous. He had been discharged, and had left vowing bitter vengeance upon all connected with the house of Lexmore. He recognised Connie quite as readily as she had him, and sprang quickly forward.

"Why, I declare, it's Connie!" he cried, grasping one of her white hands. "This is a most fortunate adventure for me, by Jove! Little Connie, and grown a thousand times prettier than ever!"

"Let go my hand!" cried Connie, angrily. "How dare you even presume to speak to me, George Grenfell!"

"By the right of an old acquaintance," he replied, with a reckless laugh. "Besides, you're just the one I wanted to see, Connie."

"Let go my hand, or I shall call for help!" cried Connie. "Rest assured Major Lexmore shall hear of this and punish you for it as you deserve!"

He laughed derisively.

"You wouldn't put on so many high and mighty airs if you knew what I know, my proud young lady. You had better make friends with me, for I always had quite a fancy for your pretty face, little Connie."

The strong hand clasped hers more firmly. The black, subtle eyes were gleaming down into her own terrified ones, and the dark face was bending down nearer her own.

It was then that Connie uttered the quick, sharp cry the stranger had heard as he stood under the trees, as she attempted to wrench her hand free from the detaining clasp of the ex-secretary.

"You contemptible coward!" she heard a voice cry; and the next instant her enemy was stretched upon the bridge. "You scoundrel, to terrify and insult a young lady! Upon my word, I have half a mind to throw you over into the river!"

And looking up, Connie saw the indignant face of the handsome young man whom she had first met in the train.

Again he raised his hat and bowed to her, and Connie never remembered in what words she thanked him for his timely assistance.

Her enemy had regained his feet, and stood glaring at the fair-haired stranger in a perfect fury of rage.

"So it's you I have to thank for this interference! We shall meet again; then you shall answer to me for this."

Without deigning a reply Connie's protector drew the little trembling hand through his arm and led her from the bridge.

They walked on in silence. A few moments later they had reached the gate of Lexmore Park.

"Won't you come in, so that my guardian may thank you for the assistance you have rendered me?" she asked.

He looked at the grey, ivy-covered stone mansion with wistful eyes for a moment, then shook his head.

"I think not," he said.

"Then you will come to-morrow?" she asked, sweetly.

A rather embarrassed smile swept over his handsome features.

"I cannot promise to do so," he answered, "much as I should like to."

Connie's pretty face flushed with pique and resentment.

"Good-night, and good-bye, then," she said, holding out her little white hand.

He bowed courteously over it for an instant, then turned and walked rapidly away in the direction of the bridge, while Connie fairly flew up the broad stone steps and through the low French window that opened on the porch.

It was only "the edge of the evening," and she knew the family would be assembled in the drawing-room, and a moment later she burst in among them like a veritable whirlwind.

Major Lexmore sat in his favourite arm-chair

by the centre-table, his head buried in his hands, an unmistakable frown on his stern, set face.

Winnie Kinder, his niece, sat at the piano, running her white, jewelled fingers over the ivory keys, taking shy, furtive glances now and then at the telegram she had received late that afternoon, and which she had carefully secreted in the pocket of her dress.

A very pretty girl was Winnie, neither blonde nor brunette. She was eighteen years of age.

Winnie was of that type that love with all their heart, or hate with all the passionate depths of their nature. Her eyes were grey, keen and penetrating, while the long lashes, and the hair that waved low upon her white forehead, were black as a raven's plume.

Her mother, Mrs. Kinder, sat near her, idly turning over the leaves of a fashion paper, scanning the pages, intent upon finding a stylish pattern to make up Winnie's new wine-coloured silk walking dress.

Connie burst in among the trio like a veritable whirlwind, and in an instant the major found two soft white arms clinging to his neck, and a gay, laughing young voice was crying out,—

"There wasn't the least bit of use in your writing that horrible letter, that I wasn't to come home this vacation, guardy; I wouldn't stay at school—I ran away, and here I am. Aren't you glad to see me, really, now?"

But before the flustered, surprised major could find his voice to reply Connie had darted off to greet Winnie, and to plant the shadowy excuse of a kiss upon Mrs. Kinder's angry ruffled brow, much to that lady's annoyance.

"Connie," began Mrs. Kinder, sharply, "how dared you disobey the major's express orders, that you were to pass the summer vacation at your boarding-school? I am amazed—shocked! Of course, the major will send you back at once!"

That was a very unwise speech—she saw it the moment after it was uttered. If there was one predominating peculiarity in Major Lexmore's character it was his anger at being dictated to. No one had a right to presume thus far; it was quite his own business as to what he intended to do.

It had been the major's intention to pack Connie straight back to school again, bag and baggage, bright and early the next morning, but he changed his mind instantly.

"Pray be kind enough to leave the management of my affairs to me, Mrs. Kinder," he said, haughtily. "Connie shall remain at Lexmore Hall and share the pleasures of the coming season with your daughter Winnie."

Connie looked delighted. Winnie looked blankly and helplessly at her mother. Mrs. Kinder's brow grew black and stormy, but she had the grace to wreathe her mouth in smiles.

"My dear brother-in-law," she said, sweetly, "your decision is always the wisest and best; but it rather changes our plans, you know. We had arranged to take Winnie to Newport."

"What has that got to do with Connie?" demanded the major. "You can take Winnie to the sea side—Connie shall stay here."

"I did not know but that you intended Connie to accompany us to Newport," murmured Mrs. Kinder, "and that step would have been quite unwise, in my opinion; for a girl in Connie's position, who will one day be a governess, or something of that kind, should not be introduced into society as a friend of our Winnie—in time we might regret it."

She spoke in a low tone; but Connie, who was standing on the other side of the room, heard every word of it, and the girl's cheeks flushed a burning scarlet, and tears of anger and wounded pride sprang to her brown eyes.

It was the first time a thought of the future—the great, barren, desolate future—flashed across her mind.

From that moment the storm-clouds of poor, hapless Connie's tragic life commenced to gather. An hour later Winnie and Connie bid each other "good-night."

The next afternoon Winnie and her mother were en route to Newport. The major had been attacked by his old enemy, the gout, and had to

abandon his plan of accompanying them at the very last moment.

It would have been far better for Winnie if she had not left Lexmore Hall on that eventful June day.

But then we must blindly follow the hand of fate wherever it leads, whether for weal or for woe.

Lexmore Hall was quite dull after Winnie's departure. Major Lexmore, who was decidedly irritable, was confined to his room, and the cross old housekeeper was no companion for a bright, restless girl like Connie.

She almost wished she had stayed at school. Tost afternoon, taking a copy of Tennyson's poems with her, she sauntered down to the beech-shaded brook that skirted Lexmore Park, and throwing off her broad sun-hat, sat down beneath the trees to read and dream over the quaint romantic love idyls; but a fair, handsome face danced between her and the printed page.

"I wonder if I shall ever see him again!" sighed Connie, wistfully; and at that moment she raised her eyes and saw standing, with indolent, careless grace, leaning against a tree, the object of her thoughts—the handsome, fair-haired stranger she had met in the train.

CHAPTER III.

CONNIE started to her feet with a cry of dismay, the prettiest of confused blushes mantling her pretty, dimpled face, while her brown eyes shone with a glad welcome.

The young man came forward, lifting his hat with indolent, careless grace.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Culver," he said, "I fear I have startled you; if so, I beg ten thousand pardons."

"You have not startled me," said Connie, blushing rosier than ever. "I—I—was just thinking about you, wondering if you would come to the Hall, so that I could present you to Major Lexmore, that he might thank you for rendering me such timely assistance the other evening on the bridge."

"One needs no thanks whatever for doing one's duty," he said, carelessly. "Please do not consider yourself under the slightest obligation to me, Miss Culver."

A swift look of annoyance crossed the brightness of Connie's face for an instant.

"He wants to be coaxed to come to the Hall, but I shall not do it," she thought, with resentful defiance; "he ought to be glad he has such an excellent reason for presenting himself at Lexmore Hall."

They spent an hour loitering beside the brook. To Connie it was the brightest and sweetest of her young life.

If Connie had but noticed it she would have seen that her companion was interested only when she spoke of Lexmore Hall or its master.

He listened with wistful eagerness to every detail of the major's illness, and the departure of Winnie Kinder and her mother for the seaside.

But here Connie made a strange mistake, inadvertently mentioning Long Beach as the place to which they had gone instead of Newport.

After that eventful morning it was no unusual thing for Connie to meet the handsome, fair-haired hero of the bridge adventure as she rambled through the woods that skirted the quaint, pretty village.

It was always by accident, never by appointment.

Let it be thoroughly understood, dear reader, that our hero was far too honourable to think for a single moment of winning the admiration or liking of the innocent, dreaming child whose acquaintance fate had decreed that he should make in so romantic a manner.

When they met but a few words of greeting were exchanged; he would make earnest, wistful inquiries after the health of Major Lexmore, then walk away, leaving Connie to her own reflections, which were always romantic day-dreams, in which a fair, handsome face and a pair of blue eyes held a prominent part.

Once he chanced to mention that he intended

to stay in Oakdale in order to witness the fire-works which she had told him were to celebrate the birthday of Harold Lexmore, the major's discarded son.

Connie never dared to think of the cold, dark days when she should see him no more.

At last the day dawned, bright, clear, and golden. The village maidens, dressed in their best, had gathered *en masse* on the green lawn to dance around the May-pole with its gay, flaunting ribbons, and coquet with their beaux, quite ready, when the shades of night gathered, to view the fire-works which the master of Lexmore Hall always furnished.

And on this day there was one young girl gazing out upon the festivities with a pair of tear-swollen eyes and a very rebellious heart. Of course, as the reader has already imagined, it was our Connie.

She had come to grief in this way: Early in the afternoon she had donned her prettiest white muslin dress, and with a cluster of scarlet roses in the bodice of her dress, and her broad straw hat pushed back from her dark curls, she was flying hurriedly down the broad corridor, when the door of Major Lexmore's room suddenly opened, and she was confronted by the major himself.

"Where are you going?" he demanded in a harsh, stern voice.

"Only out on the lawn, guardy," she answered, awed a little by his strange manner. "I want to secure a good place to see the fire-works after dusk."

"You shall not step out of this house!" thundered the major, his beetling brows darkening.

"This is the anniversary of a bitter day for me, for twenty-five years ago to-day it gave me the son who has brought down upon his rebellious head a father's curse!"

Connie longed to ask what this unhappy son had done to evoke such anger as this in his father's heart, but she dared not.

"Go back to your room and take off your finery," he commanded, and there was a look in his eyes that warned Connie he was not to be trifled with; so, with two bright spots burning in her cheeks, and tears of bitter disappointment and anger springing to her eyes, Connie wheeled round without another word, and retraced her steps, while the major re-entered his room, closing the door after him with a decided bang.

For hours Connie sat at her window peering out from behind the closed blinds.

"Because he could not enjoy himself, why should he prevent me from enjoying myself as I like!" she thought, ruefully.

As the darkness drew on apace a mischievous idea entered the little dark curly head lying so disconsolately on the window-sill.

Why couldn't she slip out for a few minutes and view the fireworks!—the major would never know anything of it until she went to him on the morrow, and, with her white arms round his neck, confessed her wilful disobedience, begging him to pardon her under promise that she would never again so offend him.

Could he find it in his heart to be very angry and refuse her! Connie thought not.

Besides, there was another very important reason urging her decision, and that was, perhaps she would see that fair-haired stranger there.

He had said he intended to stay to witness the celebration and leave the next morning, and she might never see him again.

The last reason decided beautiful, capricious Connie; and, feeling sure of being able to win the major's forgiveness, she caught up her hat, and, smoothing her disordered curls, and tying them back with a bit of crimson ribbon, Connie stole noiselessly from the house.

A tall figure, walking nervously up and down among the dense shadows of the beach-trees, gave a start of surprise as the white figure flashed past in the moonlight.

It was Major Lexmore, and he recognised Connie at once.

His dark, anger-distorted face was a study. "So she has a will of her own, and defies me, too, it seems!" he muttered.

Then a strange gleam came into his eyes.

Palling his hat low over his face, he turned and walked in the direction which Connie had taken.

Connie, in her fancied security, had made straight for the Town Hall, and, quite unluckily, the young man who had charge of the fire-works espied her, and recognising her as Major Lexmore's ward, insisted upon her accepting a seat upon one of the flag-draped balconies, where she could have an unobstructed view.

No wonder Connie gladly took the proffered seat offered her.

Bonfires blazed on the lawn in all directions, throwing a reddish-golden glare upon the throngs gathered with upturned faces before the Hall, in eager, excited expectancy, and lighting up with weird, flickering shadows the background beyond.

But in the uncertain light, amid the vast throng, Connie saw the face she was looking for.

The handsome, fair-haired stranger was standing a little apart from the rest, leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree.

Connie saw him, and her heart throbbed with a keen pleasure that was almost pain.

He did not turn his glance in the direction where she sat, and Connie was not at all sure that he saw her.

Rocket after rocket went off, breaking into a shower of crimson, purple, and golden stars against the dark background of sky, followed by stars, wheels, crosses, and crescents, amid the joyous cheers of the crowd watching below. These were instantaneously followed by green, red, and yellow lights that lighted up the weird scene like a glimpse of fairy-land for a single instant, then died away, leaving the crowd in total darkness for a moment.

During each flash of light Connie had watched the graceful figure leaning carelessly against the beach-tree—watched until the darkness hid it from her view again.

Then the last volley of rockets, six in number, was fired, which was to disperse the gathered throng. There was a deafening report, and a million golden sparks flew heavenward in a burst of crimson and purple glory.

But simultaneously with the rousing cheers, which died in every throat, terrible cries rang out upon the night air.

In an instant the horrified spectators realised what had happened.

A shower of sparks from one of the rockets had been turned aside by the rising wind, and had fallen on the balcony where Connie sat.

In a single instant it was enveloped in flames, which cut off all retreat.

The Town Hall, a mere shell of a wooden building, ignited in a single instant, and the entire structure was wrapped in a winding-sheet of flame.

It was at this moment of horror that Major Lexmore, who had made slow progress on account of his gout, came upon the scene.

In a moment he saw and realised all. With a mighty cry of horror he raised his eyes to the girlish figure standing out in bold relief against the background of fire.

Her lovely white arms were stretched out in an agony of supplication to the throng of upturned faces. Terror and despair written upon every feature of the beautiful childish face turned towards them. They saw her lips move, and they knew it was a prayer for help, although the fierce crackling of the flames drowned her piteous voice.

Major Lexmore would have sprung forward to save her, but strong arms held him back. To venture there was madness.

All this had occupied scarcely a moment, and, as is so often the case in great emergencies, the crowd stood petrified with terror, unable to move or act.

Major Lexmore's voice rang out like a bugle-blast over the great hush, broken only by the hoarse, fierce crackling of the fire-fiend:

"A thousand pounds to the man who saves that girl! I am a rich man; I will double it—ay, quadruple it! He shall have half my fortune and my blessing!"

Before the major's clarion voice had uttered the first word the stranger leaning against the

tree had taken in the terrible situation, and tearing off his coat, sprang to the rescue of the beautiful girl.

In a flash he had scaled the net-work of clinging trellis-work that swayed to and fro beneath his weight. Higher and higher he climbed while the throng watched him from below, with hushed breath and white, upturned faces. Steadily he climbed the dizzy height; his fair handsome head was on a level with the balcony now.

"Oh, Heaven! will he gain it?" was the wild cry that rose from every heart.

Mothers knelt down and prayed for the daring stranger; strong men wept as they had never wept before.

One white hand grasped the balcony now; and as poor, hapless Connie realised that succour was at hand, she took one step forward, and fell fainting at the feet of the man who had endangered his life to save her.

In a moment he had sprung over the rail of the burning balcony, and clasped the form of the fainting girl in his arms. But the crowd below dared not cheer, for the perilous descent was a thousand times more dangerous, with his burden, than the ascent had been.

Would the trellis-work bear the double burden, or would it break and cast the noble rescuer and his lovely, helpless burden headlong into the fiery furnace from which he had sought to save her?

It was a thrilling moment, and those who witnessed the scene never forgot it. The flame-wrapped branches, strained to their utmost tension, waved to and fro; yet, through the flames, step by step, the stranger made his way, and when a few feet from the ground, the tough vines snapped asunder, but the stranger, clasping his burden closer; leaped to the ground amid the rousing cheers of men, and women sobbing tears of joy—and striding forward, he laid his burden in Major Lexmore's arms, crying out:

"Do not thank me before you know who I am. Look into my face and see before you, father—your son, Harold Lexmore!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Constance Culver opened her eyes to consciousness she found herself in her own room at Lexmore Hall, with the old house-keeper bending anxiously over her, and like a flash the events narrated in the preceding chapter recurred to her.

She remembered standing terror-stricken upon the flame-wrapped portico, frantically calling for help; she remembered seeing one form dash through the petrified throng, and in another moment he had sprung to her side, while with the gladdest cry of joy that ever fell from human lips she held out her arms to her rescuer, then she staggered blindly forward, the darkness of death seeming to close in around her, and as he clasped her in his strong arms she fell back against his breast in a dead faint.

Connie listened with breathless interest while the housekeeper, Mrs. Brook, told her "how gallantly the young man, who had risked his own life to save hers, had removed his straw hat and bowed low to the throng who cheered him, with tears in their eyes, as he placed her in Major Lexmore's arms."

And then the greatest surprise and wonder of all came to light; the young man who had saved her was Major Lexmore's discarded son, handsome Harold.

In spite of the terrible anger in which he had turned Harold away, under the circumstances he could not refuse the overtures of a reconciliation.

"And now Harold is domiciled in his own suite of apartments at Lexmore Hall, bless his dear heart!" added the housekeeper.

To Connie the story seemed more wonderful and more beautiful than the pages of a romance.

"You see, dear," continued the housekeeper, wiping her glasses, "the old adage, 'that truth is stranger than fiction,' is perfectly true."

"You must thank Mr. Harold for me for saving my life," faltered Connie, burying her face in the pillow.

"He knows you're very grateful; he doesn't like much fuss over anything. Besides, I don't like to disturb him now, he is asleep; he has been sitting up all night with his father. The excitement of the fire was too much for Major Lexmore; he took straight to his bed when he came home, and the doctor looked pretty serious when I asked him how his patient was."

Connie sprang from her couch with a little distressed cry, and would have flown to the major's room at once, but the housekeeper put a detaining hand on her arm.

"You must not go until you are sent for, Connie," she said, "the Major would not like it; and, besides, in his waking hours he wants to talk alone and uninterrupted to Mr. Harold—it's only natural, you know."

For a week Connie and Harold Lexmore met constantly.

Connie lived in the sunlight of his kind, handsome face, and when she saw a small, irregular scar upon his hand, and the housekeeper told her it was a scar he had received at the fire, in very pity Connie could have knelt and kissed that hand, and the fair curling hair, too, which was slightly burned over the temples on his broad forehead.

When a young man reaches the standard of a hero in a romantic, impulsive young girl's thoughts, it is very easy to judge what the sequel will be.

It was so with Connie. In a beautiful, childish, thoughtless fashion her young heart had gone out to her hero, handsome Harold Lexmore.

That week was brought to a close by a startling event which changed the current of three lives.

It had been a stormy day, and a dark stormy night succeeded it.

Such a terrible night had not been known in Mayborough for years.

Giant trees awayed to and fro on the hill-side like reeds in the gale, and the howling winds died away in a low moan in the valley below.

The solemn hooting of the owls in the turrets of Lexmore Hall, and the creak of the shutters, mingled with the torrent of rain that beat against the window-panes, made the room in which Major Lexmore lay seem a thousand times gloomier.

For hours the Major had lain in an unconscious state, his burning, staring eyes fixed intently on the wall; and the doctor, who watched at his bedside, feared that he would pass away without one word to the son who, tired out with days and nights of weary vigil, had flung himself down on an adjacent couch to snatch a few moments of needful sleep.

It wanted an hour to midnight when Major Lexmore stirred on his pillow and looked anxiously around.

"Send my son to me; leave us alone together," he murmured.

An instant later Harold Lexmore was kneeling beside his father's couch, and the doctor quietly withdrew to an adjoining room, as he had been bidden, leaving them alone.

A half hour passed. The storm outside had redoubled its fury, and beat upon the panes with greater force, and as the doctor restlessly paced the luxurious room back and forth, was it only fancy, or, over the fierce battling of the storm outside, did he hear Harold Lexmore's voice cry out, excitedly,—

"Ask anything else of me and I will gladly do it, father; but this that you ask me I dare not do. I—"

The rest of the sentence—that is, if it were not an hallucination of the doctor's morbid fancy—was drowned in the wild howling of the warring elements outside.

Fifteen, twenty minutes passed, then a violent summons from the Major's handbell brought the doctor at once to his bedside.

Harold Lexmore knelt in the same position, his face buried in his hands. The Major was lying back upon his pillow, the livid hue of death gathering over his features. He motioned the doctor nearer with a convulsive motion.

"Bring the housekeeper to me quickly," he gasped.

A few moments later the housekeeper, Mrs. Brook, bustled into Connie's room, flushed and excited.

The girl was sitting at the window. Although the hour was late, she had not retired.

"Oh, my dear—my little Connie!" she cried, breathlessly, "I have brought you the strangest message in the world! I have just come from the major's bedside, and from Master Harold, and the message I am charged to bring you is this: Will you promise to marry Harold Lexmore!—if so, the betrothal must take place at once at the major's bedside. He is dying, Connie, his moments are numbered. You must think quickly. Remember," she added, warningly, "a betrothal is a solemn thing, child—almost as solemn as a marriage vow. Decide wisely."

The young girl had risen to her feet, her beautiful brown eyes dilating with a strange expression, her face paling and flushing, her bosom heaving with great mental excitement, her little white hands clasped convulsively over her throbbing heart. It had been all so sudden, so unexpected, Connie was dazed, bewildered, utterly speechless for a moment.

"Promise to marry him—Harold Lexmore has asked me to promise him that!" she faltered. "Did he ask you to tell me so?" she asked, trembling so that she could hardly stand.

"His father spoke for him. Poor Mr. Harold was so flustered that he could do nothing but keep his pale face hidden in the bed-clothes," she explained. "You must make up your mind quickly, Connie," she said, laying her hand on the bowed curly head. "The major won't last long, and he wishes to witness the betrothal."

"Oh, Mrs. Brook!" cried Connie, clinging to her, and sobbing hysterically, "what would you do if you were in my place? I am so young I have never even thought of such a thing as marrying any one."

"I should look into my heart and follow its dictates," responded the motherly old lady, smoothing back the girl's disordered, tangled curls. "I would never betroth myself to a man I did not love, for a betrothal is quite as solemn in the sight of Heaven as the marriage which follows. My advice would be, never betroth yourself to handsome Harold Lexmore unless you love him, for marriage without love is the greatest curse the human heart can know. You are young, Connie, and I am old," she went on. "Life is an open book to me; to you it is a sealed one, for old age only is ripe with the pitfalls of experience, and I tell you solemnly the words that will come back to you many a time in the years of your after-life. Never marry a man to whom you have not given all the love of your heart, and unless, my dear child, you are quite sure that he loves you."

"But do you think that Harold Lexmore really loves me?" queried Connie, between her sobs.

And in a quick, gasping voice she falteringly gave the old housekeeper every detail of her meeting with handsome Harold, the major's discarded son, together with each and every subsequent event which had transpired up to the time he had so bravely perilled his life to save hers.

Old Mrs. Brook was silent and thoughtful for a moment.

Ah, me! the wisest of us sometimes make the most grievous mistakes.

She folded poor, pretty, motherless Connie closer in her arms.

Yes, surely the child must have won his heart. No man would have faced certain death in the raging flames, from which strong, brave men shrank back appalled, unless the one whom he sought to save was dear as life itself. That quite convinced her, even though he had not spoken of it to Connie in so many words, until this thrilling hour in which he sent that message to her.

Connie's lovely dark eyes were raised to her face, as though the words that fell from her lips meant life or death for her.

"Yes, I believe that he loves you, Connie," she answered, slowly, "and that he would make you a good husband I feel equally sure."

Those words settled Connie's fate.

"Then, if you think best, it shall be as he wishes," murmured the girl. "I will promise to marry him; for I—oh, I love him, and I have loved him from the very first!"

A half hour later Mrs. Brook entered the major's room leading Connie by the hand—Connie in a dress of spotless white, with pale, snowy blossoms in her brown curls and on her breast.

"Thank God!" murmured Major Lexmore. His eyes, which were fast glazing over with the film of death, brightened weirdly.

A strange nervous dread filled Connie's beating heart. Oh, if Harold Lexmore would but come to her, clasp her trembling hands in his own strong ones, she would not have such a strange sinking of the heart! Why did he sit there with his head buried in the counterpane, which was not more white than his own face?

The housekeeper touched the young man's arm.

"Miss Connie is here, sir; she is ready."

Mechanically he arose and took his place by her side, but the hand that touched Connie's was as cold as marble, and the lips beneath the drooping golden moustaches white and set.

Connie had always heard how happy young girls were in the moment they were plighting their troth to the lover to whom they had given their heart; but Connie could not tell whether she was happy or terribly frightened.

Slowly and solemnly the impressive words of that death-bed betrothal were uttered. In life they were pledged each one to the other, and that within the coming year the marriage-bond should make them one.

And in the strange silence that ensued Major Lexmore's and his son's eyes met for an instant; then Harold Lexmore turned abruptly away, and Connie, who was watching her handsome lover's face, and wondering why he had no word for her, saw his face grow white, hard, and stern.

"Leave me alone!" cried the major. But to Connie he whispered in a low, gasping voice: "Come back to me within the hour, child. I have a startling confession to make. I could not die unless I had told you; I could not rest in my grave, my poor Connie, who has been so bitterly wronged, unless you were righted. You shall be righted!"

Alas for the strange complications of cruel fate! The low, faintly articulated words had been unintelligible to Connie's dazed ears. She quite believed he was murmuring a blessing over the little white hand he held clasped so tightly.

She kissed him, and, with tears in her eyes, slowly quitted the room.

At that instant the furious peal of the door-bell resounded through the house, and over the fierce blasts of the storm a woman's voice, young, shrill, and piteous, could be heard inquiring for Harold Lexmore.

"Good Heaven!" cried the young heir, turning pale as he heard that voice, "it is she!"

CHAPTER V.

CONNIE fled to her own room with swift-winged feet. She heard Winnie Kinder's voice in the corridor below, and she knew that Winnie and her mother had returned, in response to the telegram which had been sent them apprising them of the major's dangerous illness.

She would not go to Winnie now and tell her of the strange event which had just transpired; her heart was too full. Once in her own apartment, where she was safe from observation, Connie drew off the betrothal-ring Harold Lexmore had placed on her arm, white finger and covered it with passionate kisses, her pretty, dimpled face flushing rosy red.

She laughed as she remembered the quaint superstition, that "it was an unlucky omen to remove a betrothal-ring until the marriage-day dawned."

(Continued on page 234.)

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. HORN, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

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CHAPTER XL.

WHEN I had ascertained that my diamonds were really present I felt desperate. I looked round, and saw in the room in which I was—ante-room number one—my mother, lounging in an armchair, and whispering to a man who sat very close to her with his hands clasped, and his head bent.

In a moment I was beside her, at her left hand, and with a hasty "excuse me" I leant over and whispered in my turn,—

"An old lady in the next room has on my diamond necklace. You must get her away!"

"I!" with a look of languid amusement. "My dear Mrs. Halford," she spoke aloud, "what have I to do with it! What can I do?"

"What I say!" I repeated, also aloud and nearly maddened to desperation by her cool equanimity. "Lady Lorraine, you must! If not I will leave it to you to bear the consequences."

And quivering with agitation—yes, and indignation—I walked away, and I was just in time to meet Hugh, who came towards me, carefully carrying a glass of water.

"I had the greatest work to get it," he said, as he handed it to me. "If it had only been champagne—but water is scarce. I am sorry, darling, I have been so long."

Poor Hugh! He had already recovered his good temper. Little did he guess what his delay had been to me!

My eyes filled with remorseful tears when I thought how good and loyal he had always been to me, and how treacherously I was treating him, all for the sake of one who did not value my efforts on her behalf any more than if they had never cost me thought, a penny, or a tear!

I saw her looking hard at me once or twice. Evidently she looked to me to get myself out of the scrape as best I could, as usual: but for once I was firm.

Why should I always be her scapegoat, her cat's-paw, even although I was her only child! And I returned her look with one of stony indifference.

I did not intend to move, no, nor to lift a finger to save myself. I knew that my fate trembled in the balance.

Were Hugh, or Jack Hare, or any of my friends to enter the next room, at the door of which I sat sentry, the whole affair of the sale of my diamond necklace would be known to everyone in five minutes.

Just at this crisis Hugh was called away, and left me with many tender apologies. Oh, little he guessed how much more freely I breathed as I saw him vanish towards the ball-room!

Presently Lady Lorraine rose, and came towards me with graceful deliberation.

"What do you mean?" she whispered, impatiently, as she stood beside me in the doorway. "Where is this old woman? Show her to me!" beckoning me to her with an imperative gesture of her hand.

"You will see her soon enough," I answered. "She is at the end there, next the door, and looks as if she were asleep."

"Oh! it's Mrs. Moneybags. Luckily, I know her," said Lady Lorraine, in a low tone; then aloud, "Dear Mrs. Moneybags, this is an unexpected pleasure. Where did you come from?"

"Oh, Lady Lorraine!" blinking, and delighted at this gracious notice. "I came from town. I've a nephew in the regiment. They have done everything very well, have they not? I wonder when supper will be served!"

"Very soon, I believe. What magnificent diamonds, my dear Mrs. Moneybags; they are superb!"

"Yes; they are," smiling a fat, complacent smile.

"But how dangerous of you to wear what is not your own!"

"What do you mean?" becoming purple.

"I mean that that necklace belongs to a very

near relative of mine. She left it at Gold and Onyx to be cleaned. She will be surprised when she hears of this; in fact, she is present at the ball. If I were you I would not let her see it; she is quite capable of flying at you, and making a regular scene. You have not bought the necklace, surely! It is valued at twenty thousand pounds."

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" said the now terrified Mrs. Moneybags, shaking all over like a shape of jelly. "This is terrible! No; I hired it for the night from Gold and Onyx for twenty-five pounds."

"A smart sum; but, speaking as your friend, my dear madam, I would strongly advise you to take it off, and put it in your pocket before it is seen. It is a well-known necklace down here—yes, and in London."

"If you would be so very kind as to unfasten it I will do as you say," returned the trembling Mrs. Moneybags, "or perhaps the young lady," looking at me, "will be so kind, and I was so kind."

I unfastened the clasp with the greatest alacrity and placed the necklace in her hand.

"Put it away—hide it!" I could not resist saying in my eagerness. "For goodness sake don't let it be seen!"

"Is she coming?" stammered Mrs. Moneybags, looking about in great alarm. "Do you see her?"

"No; but you must be cautious. I know she would be furious with Gold and Onyx if she knew that they hired out her necklace by the night."

"Yes! I would not wonder if she took an action against them," supplemented her ladyship, calmly—"against them and you, so do be careful!"

With this remark she turned away, leaving the old lady with very little appetite for supper.

Poor Mrs. Moneybags! I was sorry for her, and only that I was afraid she might make some awkward confidences I would have despatched Hugh himself to escort her in to supper.

"You see how cleverly I can manage things!" said my mother. "I never lose my nerve, and my wits as you do. Why, your very face as you stood at that door was enough to arouse anyone's suspicions. No, you have not a scrap of pluck or presence of mind; so different to me—my courage invariably rises to the occasion."

"Very likely; but you seem to have plenty of practice. I have not, and I hope I may never require to be a proficient in the art of dissimulation."

Lady Lorraine looked at me sharply, and said,—

"This is no way to speak to me. Here is a pretty return to me for helping you out of an awkward scrape!"

"Which I only got into for your sole benefit," I promptly replied. "And now that I have sacrificed my diamonds for you I think you might at least release me from my promises, and let me tell Hugh. The diamonds may go; I do not grudge them, nor the tears and trouble you have cost me; but, mother, I appeal to you, by any affection you ever bore for me when you say I was a pretty little flaxen-haired baby, let me tell Hugh. I cannot endure to deceive him; it will break my heart if I lose his confidence and respect."

"No, you cannot tell Hugh yet, in time you shall. At present, if you told him it would ruin me."

"But I know—" I began.

"I know for an absolute fact that his knowledge of my secret would be fatal to my happiness."

"And what of my happiness, mother?" I asked, with trembling lips and moist imploring eyes.

"When you look at me like that you are the image of your aunt Annie!"

"Who died?"

"Yes, the little goose. She took a love affair to heart."

"I shall die, too, if this goes on; this double dealing will kill me."

"Not at all, you are tough, like me; our delicate looks are a delusion. As to your happi-

ness, as you call it, about which you are so tearfully anxious; you have beauty and youth—they are happiness."

"I believe happiness to be a ghost," I exclaimed impatiently. "Everyone has heard of it, but few, if any, have ever seen it."

"What an odd idea! Well, I am not going to stay moralling here any longer. I believe that I am hungry. I believe I see Captain Carden coming to take me in to supper. Good-bye! my little dreamer."

I stood and watched her graceful figure and long satin train gradually pass from sight, and then I sat down, all alone. Any appetite I had had for sweets and ices my mother had most effectually dispelled.

"What! all alone!" said Hugh, "and buried in a brown study? Oh! come, this will never do! Come, rouse up, and have some supper. I have made up a jolly little party. The Roses, Jack, Vivian and myself and yourself. I have been hunting for you everywhere, for Jack told me he thought he saw you dancing in the last Lancers."

I suffered myself to be led away, and under the influence of Hugh's really anxious attentions, and the mirth of a very merry young party, I soon became something like myself, especially as that new horrid word—to me—the word "diamonds," was not uttered in my hearing for the remainder of the night.

After the grand, much-praised Regimental Ball all went smoothly for a week. There was not a single ripple on the surface of our life, nothing to denote the gathering storm which was coming up so surely, and so speedily. Poor little imbecile that I was, I believed that the worst was now tided over. Lady Lorraine once more left me entirely to myself.

Ten days after the ball the proverbial calm that foreruns a storm came to an end, and a tempest burst over my devoted head that swept me away from my happy home, like a leaf that flutters in the blast.

CHAPTER XLI.

ONE DAY Hugh went to London, went by the early express, as I had once done—though I did not impart this news to him, as I drove him to the station and saw him off.

"Rance!" he said, as I stood with my hand on the door of the railway carriage, "I shall be back by the 4.50 train, and I am going to bring you something nice, so you may spend the day in expectation of a delightful surprise."

Accordingly I did spend my day in wondering very much what this "something nice" could be. The train would not be in till after six, and as it was a pouring wet afternoon I did not again go out, but watched from the army-room window, and flew to open the door myself when a fly from the station stopped at our house. Of course it contained Hugh.

Having flung the man some coin he hastily entered the house, saying, as he walked past me,—

"Follow me in here."

This was very odd behaviour! Luckily Harris was not in the hall, and I followed my lord and master into the dining-room in considerable trepidation; and no wonder. His voice was ominous—his countenance blacker than a thunder-cloud. Once fairly in the room he rushed past me and shut the door; and then turning about, took me by the hand and led, or indeed almost dragged, me to the window; where, by the now fast-fading light, he surveyed me for some seconds in silence.

"What does this mean?" I demanded at last, unable to bear the strain of suspense; and the appalling agitation that seemed to overwhelm him.

"It means," he said in a low, but perfectly distinct voice, "that I have found you out."

I was conscious of becoming cold all over; and, no doubt, as he made this announcement, every particle of colour sank from my abominably tell-tale countenance.

"Yes," he said, with a grim smile, that was positively ghastly. "I intended a nice little

surprise for you to-day. I found, to my cost, that the boot was on the other foot, that you had arranged a similar affair for me—a surprise with a vengeance!"

"Tell me what you mean!" I inquired, plucking up a little spirit; there was no use in lying down and being trampled upon. I intended to try and show, if possible, my mother's qualities when she found herself in hot water—those qualities that she so much prided herself upon—to wit, pluck, coolness, and presence of mind!

"I mean that I have discovered why you were unable to wear your diamond necklace. You could not well wear what was not in your possession. You have sold it!"

"Yes; I have raised money on it," I faltered, suddenly sitting down in the nearest chair.

"You have deceived me from first to last, you false, wicked girl; and by a mere accident I have found out some of your practices," he said, hoarsely. "My eyes have been opened once for all, and I am amazed that you, a simple, as I thought timid, inexperienced child, could have the boldness and resource of an accomplished intriguer. Let me tell you how much I know, so that you may understand how little you and I are going to have to say to each other for the future. You are as much dead to me now as my wife, though you sit there alive and looking at me, as if you were living in your coffin. No! you need not try to speak, extenuation is out of the question. I have the evidence of my own senses—hearing and seeing. You told many lies, you have hoodwinked me completely; you shall never have the chance of doing so again."

"What lies have I ever told?" I asked, defiantly.

"They are almost too numerous to count, but I may mention the fables about your necklace the night of the ball, and the solemn promise you have made about Lady Lorraine and broke; you had the assurance to deny that you met whilst I was away."

"No; I only said I did not write to her—that I did not go to her house."

"There, no more," interrupting me impatiently. "Shall I tell you what I did in London to-day? Like a precious idiot I was anxious to make you some present, as a reward for having kept your promise about Lady Lorraine. With this virtuous intention in my mind I went from one jeweller's shop to another, looking at the windows to see if I could discover some pretty thing that would suit your taste, and my purse."

"Finally I came to the establishment of Messrs. Gold and Onyx, and found a little crowd, who were gazing at something displayed in one of the windows. I elbowed my way among them, and to my surprise I found that the very pretty thing that they were admiring was no more or less than your necklace!"

"At first I thought it might be an imitation. I could scarcely credit my own eyes, believing as I did so firmly that it was lying in your dressing-case at Southsea, with a broken clasp. However, I thought, as I was on the spot, I might as well make inquiries, and I went in and asked one of the assistants if I might be allowed to look at the splendid diamonds that were displayed in the window to the left. I soon had the necklace spread before me, and there was no doubt whatever that it was the Indian necklace—and yours."

"After this I asked for a private interview with the head of the firm, and was allotted for some time in a back room with Mr. Gold. At first he was inclined to refuse me information, merely saying that it was partly their property, and that they had advanced a very large sum on it to a lady, whose name they would not divulge."

"I then produced my card, and asked him if the lady's name was not the same as my own. I told him that I was ready to swear that the diamond necklace was my wife's property, and then I begged that, in all confidence, he would tell me how it came into his possession."

"Think," he said, turning fiercely on me, "of having to beg of a stranger to admit me into his confidence in a matter connected with my own wife!"

He paused and wiped his forehead, and then resumed, speaking very rapidly,—

"He told me that my surname was correct;

that three weeks previously a lady and gentleman had come together and offered the diamonds for sale, that the lady was young and closely veiled, the gentleman a good deal her senior, that he had managed the entire transaction, and proved a very keen customer. However, the diamonds were magnificent. There was not such another necklace in the country."

"Then, to prove his words, he produced a written receipt for six thousand pounds, signed in a very trembling scrawl, which I recognised for yours; but this was not all. He showed me a kind of deed, jointly signed by you and Torpichen, undertaking to pay interest for a year; and if the necklace was not reclaimed by the end of that period to give it up on payment of a further sum of money."

"You may or may not imagine the blow all this was to me. For some time I sat stupefied, and then I glanced at the date. It was a date I remembered, for I had been in town on business that very day myself. I had come across Torpichen, luncheon with a mysterious veiled lady; and little did I guess, as I stood within a few yards of her, that that lady was my own wife!"

"I don't remember how I got out of Gold and Onyx's shop. I daresay the crowd outside, who were gazing at the necklace again displayed in the window, took me for a drunken man. I had secured the number of the cheque paid to you, and I drove straight to Coutts' Bank, and had an interview with the manager, my object being to find out if you had drawn the money out in your own name, or made it payable to anyone else. I found that the money had been made over intact to the signature of Olive Lorraine, and that she had cashed it. I saw the cheque. I held it in my own hands!"

He paused and struggled with some choking of his breath, and did not speak for several seconds. I was literally dumb. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, as if it was paralyzed.

"Now, what I have to find out is—needless to ask you—why you secretly pawned your diamonds and made over such a sum as six thousand pounds to Lady Lorraine, a stranger to you six months ago! No one gives without a return of some kind nowadays. You paid that money down for value received. What value? I asked myself. Lady Lorraine is in possession of some secret of yours. That sum was hush-money, the price of her silence—a large price—and the secret must be worth that much to you."

"Lady Lorraine is a bad woman! So are you! Birds of a feather flock together! Ralph Torpichen is your lover. Lady Lorraine has you both in her power. She has hinted at disclosing certain facts to me; and consequently you and he hurry up to London. He naturally transacts your business—sells your diamonds for you, and you are thus enabled with a good round sum to stop her ladyship's mouth."

"You see I have unravelled the whole story quite easily, and a very nice story it is! One thing—it shall not come into the papers. I would die rather than have my name dragged publicly through the gutter, whatever may have happened to it in private! So I shall not divorce you nor take legal proceedings in the matter. I shall keep you under my own eyes, chained up, figuratively speaking, as if you were a dangerous animal! As to your cousin and lover I shall invite him over to France and shoot him!"

"Hugh! Hugh!" I cried, rising and gasping for breath. "You are all wrong—wrong. I am innocent, and so is Ralph; but I am killed by a secret that is not mine."

"Innocent! Oh, of course, you all say that. How innocent of you to steal up to London alone with him to pledge your diamonds! Can you deny that? No, it would be folly."

"I did go to London. I did pledge the diamonds."

"Thank you! I am already in possession of those facts."

"But that is all. Oh, Hugh!" seizing his arm, "I implore you to believe me. I have lost my diamonds. I have lost my peace of mind for months. Oh! don't let me lose you too."

"Don't touch me!" he exclaimed, pushing me rudely away. "Keep your tears and caresses to yourself; it makes me sick with shame to see

you. Here, go up to your own room, and stay there till I have time to collect my thoughts, and arrange what I shall do with you. At this moment I feel as if I was going mad," and indeed he looked like it.

I believe he gave out to the servants that I was very ill, and indeed I was. I remained in my room for three days, and saw no one but my own maid, who was unusually cool and stiff in her manner.

I wrote a despairing note to Lady Lorraine, imploring her to release me from my promise, and each hour I looked for an answer, but none came. At the end of the three days I was nearly frantic, as may be imagined. On the evening of the third I received a pencilled note from Hugh, which said,—*"Come down to the drawing-room at half-past eight o'clock.—H.H."*

And to the drawing-room I repaired with a beating heart. I felt, and no doubt, looked ill, but I was quite shocked by the change those three days had already wrought in Hugh. He looked ten years older, and worn and haggard, and inexpressibly stern. This was not Hugh—the Hugh that I knew! This was surely his elder brother, and another person!

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a chair, "for what I have to say will take some time. I have been making inquiries about you from the servants; yes, I have actually stooped to that!" and he paused and looked at me. "I cannot fall much lower, and it is you who have dragged me down. Luckily this terrible thing that has exploded my home is not known to my brother officers—few are in the secret—only you and I, Torpichen, Lady Lorraine and the servants."

"The servants know nothing!" I cried.

"It all depends upon what you call nothing. They know that you went out at ten o'clock one night, you were seen going to Torpichen's hotel, and he brought you back here between twelve and one o'clock. He called the next day, and you were at home to no one else, and he remained with you for nearly two hours!"

"Half-an-hour at the outside," I broke in impetuously.

"Be silent," he said, sternly. "A note came for you yesterday from Lady Lorraine; in reply, I presume, to one of yours. I have read it. Here it is," producing it from his pocket. "I shall now read it aloud, and you can hear how nicely it sounds."

"DEAR DIANA,—

"Your letter, partly illegible, received. What a bore this is about your diamonds; what evil little imp took your husband to Gold's! I am sorry I can do nothing, I am in the midst of packing; we have let our house, and are going yachting for the next two months with the Joneses, Johnsons and Captain Carden. All married people have rows more or less; the great thing is not to be afraid of your husband. I grant you that yours is a specially bad case. You are married to a bear—still bears can be tamed, and after his sulks are over you must smooth him down and humour him, and by-and-by he will dance very prettily. Whatever happens brave it out. This is my receipt, and never has failed me yet. As to what you ask, it is at present quite out of the question. *Au revoir*, my dear! If you are still at Southsea when I return we shall have many a laugh over this ridiculous fuss that has been made—all because you have taken the liberty of doing what you like with your own. Your husband seems entirely to forget that he is a pauper, and has married a pretty woman with a large fortune upon which he lives. Do not allow him to bully you into the bargain. I shall expect when I return to find that you have tamed him. Stop the supplies, that's the way to bring him to his senses; and I trust that I shall find you when I return the happy proprietor of a very well-behaved tame dancing bear.—Yours till we meet again,

"O. LORRAINE."

This was a pretty letter to fall into a husband's hands, and more especially into the hands that were holding it! I could give no idea of the sarcastic emphasis with which Hugh read this really awful document. If my affairs

could have been any worse than they were already this letter, so sublimely indifferent to my fate—so mocking in its tone of easy patronage, so insolent in its reference to my dancing bear—this letter then hurled me to the lowest depths to which it was my misfortune to fall. In it Hugh read, in his mind's eye, the reflection of letters of mine—letters that doubtless had abused him, laughed at him, ridiculed his empty pockets!

After he had concluded this epistle he handed it to me politely and said,—

"I am sure you would wish to have this valuable autograph letter in your own keeping. I am glad that I have been able to furnish so much amusement to you and your correspondent in the past, but your fun at my expense is at an end."

As he spoke I tore the letter into atoms, and scattered it on the floor.

"I have been seriously considering what I am to do with you, Mrs. Halford. I could not endure your presence in my house, and yet I do not wish to have the open mouth of scandal busy with your name. You are to go to Peggy; she is a decent old woman, and has some influence with you. She is coming to fetch you to-morrow. Your money is your own, and you can live very comfortably on your income, unless there are other heavy calls upon your purse similar to the one made upon it by your brilliant correspondent. The regiment goes to Ireland shortly, so I shall give up this house, sell off the cobs and horses with the exception of the chestnut hack, which I return to Torpichen, and I shall go back to my barrack-room and my bachelor life. If anyone asks questions I will say that you have gone home—Brayfield is your home—as the climate of Ireland is too damp for your lungs, or some such fable."

"And I—what am I to say!"

"Say," turning on me fiercely, "say that your sins have found you out! say that I have done with you; say to anyone who asks you that you are one of a tribe that is now becoming unpleasantly numerous—a disgraced, discarded married woman, and no longer my wife!"

With this overwhelming speech he left me alone.

CHAPTER XLII

AFTER this scene I think I became rather silly. I recollect, as a kind of dream, Peggy's arrival in deep widow's weeds, for Tony was dead; Peggy's long interview with Hugh, her busy packing up of numerous ornaments and dresses, the gradual dismemberment of my pretty home.

I sat in a kind of dazed way, and looked out of the windows. I never spoke, I only sat and stared out like some half-witted creature.

I noticed without any surprise a lady driving my cobs and victoria. I noticed Mrs. Rose's little trap at our door; but she never came in. Various people called, and saw no one.

Then, one morning in October, Peggy and I went away. I said no good-byes, and I had never once seen Hugh since that terrible evening when he had read me Lady Lorraine's letter.

After I had been a few days at Brayfield my brain, which had been quite stunned, seemed to recover itself, and I became painfully alive to my position, and to Peggy's tears, and sighs, and averted eyes.

The first thing I did when I had recovered the power of speech and feeling was to sit down on a low stool beside her, lay my head in her lap, and tell her the whole story from first to last, just as I had been used to relate my grievances as a child.

It took a long time to tell, for it was interrupted with sobs and tears, and Peggy listened with breathless attention, as I, warning to the recital of my wrongs, gradually sat erect, then stood up, then paced the room from end to end as I poured forth all my troubles and my wrongs.

"I knew my girl could hardly be so changed," she said, wiping her eyes. "I knew it; but what had I to say when Captain Halford took me into his writing-room alone, and told me the

most terrible tale that ever I heard in all my life before—ay, and proved it! All I could say was, 'If Miss Rance did what you say the poor child is out of her mind, and ought to be put up in some private asylum.' That's just what I said, Miss Rance, and I tell it back to your own face."

"And what did he say!"

"He said that you were as sane as I was, but that if he had to live with you much longer he would be in Hanwell, which I take it is a mad-house."

My wrath, which had been rising, now blazed out, and I said,—

"And he has nearly reduced me to idocy. I never want to see him again! Oh, Peggy, although he is my husband, I must speak or my heart will burst! If you knew all I have undergone from his violent temper and insane jealousy you would wonder."

"But still, Miss Rance, you did wrong in keeping things from him, and you did things that even to me looked very black, and I was partly in the secret!"

"It's that secret that has ruined me—ruined me, Peggy!" I cried, putting my hands to my head. "That secret, and my diamonds!"

"And what in the name of goodness have they to say to it, my darling girl!"

"Listen! You remember how I wore them that first time at dinner! They blazed me forth as an heiress to Hugh, who was already in love with me; but their great value frightened him and sealed his lips, but opened the mouths of his two companions, who would have married me if I would have accepted them, whether uncle or nephew."

"You yourself know the dangers they made me run—from thieves twice. You are aware how they lured on Carrie to consent to my being carried off by Joe; they were her inducement, and her irresistible temptation."

"True, they helped me to escape by drawing Hugh's eyes on me in the theatre; but, on the other hand, it was they who discovered me to my mother, and see what discovery has cost me! They have twice betrayed me, and sold me into bondage—first to her, and secondly to Hugh. You cannot deny that! I hate them now! If I had not been so unhappy as to possess them I would never have got into all this dreadful trouble!"

"You can get out of it yet, my child, and would have long ago if I had been at your elbow. You must just write to her ladyship at once, and say that in such desperate affairs as yours she must release you from your oath, that your husband must be told her secret, that surely for her own whims she does not want to ruin her daughter for life—does she!"

"How can I write! I do not know where she is! She is yachting; the sea is a wide address!"

"I knew she was giddy and thoughtless, and had next to no heart; but I never would have believed she would turn out like this. Why, even an animal has some love for its own! There does be birds that pluck the down and feathers off themselves to make nests for their young! With her—more shame for her—it's the other way! She plucks you bare to feather her own nest; leaves you without home and husband and character, and goes off as if it was nothing but a joke! She broke your father's heart, though he did not die of it! You must be hard and determined, and fight for yourself, or she will break yours!"

"It is too late now! I have nothing left to fight for!"

"Your husband!"

"No! Since bad as things looked—and oh, Peggy, Peggy, they looked very black—he would not listen to me, nor believe me! He never gave me one chance. What is his love when it is swallowed up in jealousy—burnt away as if by fire! No; I cannot bring myself to forgive Hugh. He is not what I thought he was. He is unjust, stern and overbearing. He has cast me out of his home, and I shall never seek to return to him or his!"

"That's nonsense; and you talk like that because you are angry. And no wonder, my poor child, that your heart is sore, for among them

all they have been hard on you; but maybe this baby that's coming in the spring will make it up to you."

"Don't talk of it!" I cried, passionately. "I hope I shall die, and it too; and then Hugh will be satisfied. I am sick of life; weary of living!"

"Goodness forgive you for such desperate, wicked talk!" It's well seen you are a bit off head! I suppose he knew nothing!"

"No one knows anything. No one is going to know! Oh, Peg, if I only could get back to India! I long with a craving that I cannot express to you to see the dear old bungalow by the Kharran. Oh, how little I knew what was in store for me when I used to sit on the bank, and look at the stars, and long to see the great, big, stirring world; and to take my part in life!"

"Well, I have had my wish! I have played my part! It has been, as you know, a dead, dead failure, even although I have had riches and youth, and beauty."

"Friends have failed me, all but the Parishes and you. Relations have been robbers. My mother has ruined me, and my husband has broken my heart. I have some money left, Peggy, you had no bribe. You shall have every penny I possess, but do, do engage our passages in the next P. & O., and let us return to the obscurity from which we emerged three years ago! I feel as if my only chance of being happy again—happy is too strong a term! I am miserable I should say—is to see once more nothing but the jungle stretching round me. And if I die you will bury me under the palm-tree beside father and my little brother; and if you like to put a tombstone at my head you might inscribe on it,—

"Diana (not Halford) only Diana! Diana died, aged twenty-one! 'All is vanity.'"

"Vanity!" screamed Peggy. "I should just think so! I never in this mortal world heard such mad talk! You are not going a step to India at present. Keep yourself quiet, and everything will come round yet, and some day you will be glad that it was only old Peggy Clark that was listening to such wickedness."

In a week or two I saw the departure of Hugh's regiment to Ireland, and Peggy and I moved into a very pretty old-fashioned old house that was more suitable to my circumstances than her cottage. I always detested the cottage since I had had that dreadful adventure in it with the burglar, and I would not have slept alone in my old room for any consideration.

Moving into a new house, which was comfortable, retired, picturesque and cheap, distracted my mind. Somewhat it stood in pretty sheltered grounds, and boasted some fine lime trees, and an old-fashioned terraced garden.

Here Peggy unpacked the salvage from the wreck of my household gods, engaged cook, gardener, and parlour-maid, and established herself as working housekeeper. I was close to Mrs. Parish, and saw her daily, but other visitors I refused to meet, telling her to give for the public ear that I was ill; and so I was in mind. I told my kind, sympathetic friend all I could tell of my story; save and excepting the identity of Lady Lorraine. I told her about Hugh and Ralph, and the pledged diamonds, and my subsequent disgrace, as I sat beside her sofa with her hand in mine, and she believed me—more than Hugh had done!

My spirits sank day by day till they arrived at zero. Nothing could raise them, and I was, as it were, determined to die. I would not buy myself a new hat or dress, much less invest in a pony or piano, as I always assured Peggy and Mrs. Parish that it really was not worth while to go to any expense for such a short time; and that what I had about me would last for my day! A depressing style of conversation that made Mrs. Parish weep, but had filled Peggy with fury.

"And only you are by way of being grown up, Miss Rance," she would say, "I would just give you a real good slap!"

I had ceased to speak of Hugh to anyone, for Peggy once turned on me sharply, and said,—

"And serve you right, when you could have married Sir Ralph, that worships the ground that you walk on. Then you would not look at him,



"I HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING WHAT I AM TO DO WITH YOU, MRS. HALFORD," SAID HUGH.

because the other was young and handsome; and now you are served out! Look how different you would have been as Lady Torpichen of the Park! Ay, and he was not near as much in love as Sir Ralph! He was in love against his will; but you would have him. Girls is always contrary."

I believe Mrs. Parish had something of the same idea. As to Mr. Parish, he stood by his own sex, and though he was fond of me, yet I had a conviction that he sided with Hugh.

I had not been guilty of any grave fault, of that he was sure; but I was young, impetuous, and imprudent.

And after all I did not die; but I was the mother of so miserable an infant, such a thin, tiny, weird-looking little mite, that Peggy was, as she informed me,—

"Ashamed of her life to show it to anyone—a fairy thing, the size of a doll, and that I had her disgraced! Very different to what you were, Miss Rance, yourself! I used to be proud to carry you out when you were in your grand long cloak, and to have half the world stopping me to admire the baby; but now, when anyone stops me, and asks to look at Mrs. Halford's infant, I feel ready to turn and run. And they all say, 'Oh, dear me! It's very small.' Small! you can hardly see him without spectacles. I hope he is not going to turn a dwarf on us!"

Peggy's fears were unnecessary. He lived two months, and died quite suddenly in my lap one evening.

To me he had been everything, and I was indeed desolate—yes, wild with grief after a little mite of a creature that was only eight weeks old, and that I was by no means so handy at carrying as Peggy could have wished. Still he was my own—a small thing, but mine own!

Hugh had never taken any notice to me of his birth; but Mr. Parish had a letter, so Mrs. Parish told me, and a letter in which he was anything but enthusiastic about this addition to his family. He never once alluded to me.

I called the baby John Arthur after my father and Mr. Parish, and considered that in

thus ignoring Hugh and his side of the house I had in some measure paid him out.

Mr. Parish telegraphed to him when baby died, and by rapid travelling he arrived the morning of the funeral.

I saw him walking up the avenue with Mr. Parish, and he saw the child in its little coffin; but he did not see me.

He did not offer, nor did I volunteer an interview; indeed, I was not thinking of him so much as of my sweet little dead baby that was being carried away from me for ever that cruel May morning.

After the funeral he and Mr. Parish had a long talk. He also had a conversation with Peggy, who spoke her mind to him freely, by her own account.

"I told him," she said, "just told him to his face that it was all the fretting you had last year that killed the child now, and that anyone could see, except you, Miss Rance, that it was born with all the cares of the world upon its poor little shoulders. To look in its grave little face —"

"Yes, and what did he say?"

"He said he knew nothing of babies, that they all looked the same—goodness forgive him!—and that if he had known he would not have let you come off with me at all. 'And if you did not, sir,' says I, 'she would have been dead, for she was half killed with all the ructions, as it was.'"

"And you think I had a hand in it?" he says, very sharp.

"Fair," says I, "I don't think it at all—I know it, and not one hand, but two. You are not fit to have a wife."

"And I am much better without one," says he."

Peggy may or may not have said all this; she was apt to ornament bygone conversations.

Mr. Parish's talk was a serious one, and lasted more than an hour in the study (so Mrs. Parish imparted to me afterwards).

"I could hear Arthur arguing, and talking,

and thumping," she said, "as if he was in the pulpit."

The upshot of the matter was, that to save appearances only, and for the sake of my own name only, which had, it seems, been very roughly handled in some places, I was to join Hugh at the Curragh for the rest of the summer.

"There," he assured Mr. Parish, "he had a large field officer's hut, and we need scarcely see each other at all," and this he dwelt upon as a strong inducement.

(To be continued.)

IRON filings, sand, and Chinese clay are much used in mixing with tea. These foreign substances make the tea weigh heavier, and it is hard for anyone not an expert in tea to discover their presence. The Chinamen are adepts at this business of adulteration. In the case of the iron filings, they are scattered over the leaves while they are green, and as the leaves curl up and dry, they cover this foreign substance from sight.

POSSESSORS of pearls have the care of some very precarious treasure. There is probably no gem that is so subject to accident and injury, and none that once damaged is so impossible to restore. They are composed very largely of carbonate of lime, which is readily affected by acids, and sometimes by the condition of the atmosphere. They are very frail and easily cracked or broken. It is not generally understood that there are many persons who cannot successfully wear pearls at all. An excess of acid in the perspiration sometimes destroys their beauty, and even careless handling has been known to tarnish them past restoring. They burn into a bit of lime dust and frequently lose their lustre from causes which cannot be ascertained. Experts sometimes claim to be able to clean them, but the process is not always satisfactory.



LADY MURIEL CAME AND STOOD BESIDE HER HUSBAND, TREMBLING WITH FRIGHT AND AGITATION.

HAROLD VANE: ARTIST.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A GENTLEMAN was humming a tune to himself as he sauntered along Piccadilly westward, and idly remarked on the ceaseless roll of vehicles and the never-ending stream of pedestrians that filled the noble thoroughfare. He was an artist—high in repute, almost at the top of the tree; his name attached to a picture always drew crowds to see it; and his work hung on the Academy walls meant an extra policeman and a crimson rope, and eager people struggling to look over one another's shoulders to see what new phase of life he had represented.

His pictures were known all over the world now, and spoke to high and low from the walls of cottage and palace alike in some form or other, as books speak of their authors from the shelves. But he had not always been a successful man. There had been a time when he had set his foot on the very bottom of the ladder and almost despaired of getting any higher, and some of his best pictures had been painted during that time of hope deferred and black despair—painted when he was obliged to go dinnerless many a day to purchase the materials for his work. He put his soul upon the canvas, he was wont to say, when he talked of those times, as he did sometimes to encourage struggling beginners to greater efforts, and to comfort the faint-hearted, who were discouraged at some first failure.

He was going back to those times now as he walked along—the cynosure of many eyes, for he was a notable-looking man, with silvery hair and a general picturesqueness of appearance that attracted attention. He had been to a morning concert, and the song he was humming had fixed itself in his mind.

"Ay, velvet and rage," he said to himself, as

there was a general lifting of hats and smiles of glad recognition as the Queen drove by with her youngest children—toddling was things then—by her side. Almost as she passed the artist heard a low, gasping sob and looked round. It was only a lad leaning against the frame of a shop-window with his face hidden in his hands and the tears streaming through his fingers—only a lonely lad in the midst of the great whirl of London crying about something. What did it matter to anybody what his trouble was?

It was a favourite shop-window. Nearly everyone stopped there to look at the exquisite works of art there displayed, and the window itself was no mean specimen of what decorators can do when they have heads to direct their hands. It was certainly not a shop for a common boy to linger about and cry over and spoil the gilding by the contact with his mean attire; and a policeman, disturbed in his mind by the spectacle, went up to the boy and took him by the shoulder.

"Now, then, move on," he said, sharply. "Don't stand blubbering there."

"I'm doing no harm," the lad replied. "I was only looking at that."

He pointed to a beautiful photograph of a bit of rural scenery that was enough to make anyone stop and gaze at it—a country village, with its green and its picturesque dwellings most artistically transferred to the paper.

The boy stared at it with a hungry look in his eyes, regardless of the grip of the policeman's hand, as if he could not look enough.

"Oh, a likely story!" the officer said, gruffly. "What do you want to look at that for? A nice blind for looking after something else."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know what I mean well enough. Take yourself off, or it will be worse for you!"

"Let him alone, policeman. I don't think he's a burglar or a highway robber," said a kindly voice over the man's shoulder; and the artist, who had noticed the look in the lad's eyes, stopped to interfere.

"Certainly, Sir Geoffrey. I was only fearful

he was after no good, that was all," said the officer, who knew Sir Geoffrey Remington very well, having been on duty at Burlington House many times.

He moved away, and the great artist turned to the boy, whose colour was coming and going in a curious fashion, and who was looking at his new friend with an odd confusion in his face.

"What were you doing, my lad?" he asked.

"Only looking in at that window, sir!" was the quiet reply. "I didn't mean any harm, and that picture—"

"Well, what about it?"

"It was my home—I lived there, and—"

The tears would have their way now, and the boy sobbed passionately for a minute, and then, without a sign of warning, dropped in a huddled heap at Sir Geoffrey's feet. There was a little crowd in a moment, and the ubiquitous policeman was there again directly and picked the boy up.

The wan face was as white as a corpse now, and the emaciated limbs were clearly visible through the thin clothing.

"Shall I take him to the hospital, Sir Geoffrey?" asked the officer.

"No, across the road to the restaurant yonder. He is starving, I suspect."

The mob which had gathered were baulked of any excitement they expected, for no more was seen of the artist and his protégé. The policeman came out again, but had nothing to say. He looked as wise as ever Lord Burleigh did; but as he had nothing to tell he held his tongue and let people imagine what they would.

The boy had been taken to a private room, and Sir Geoffrey had gone with him, and they had sent for wine, and that was all.

The artist had guessed rightly when he decided it was hunger that ailed the boy. He had been interested by the face, which had nothing vicious in it, but much intelligence; and he resolved to hear whatever story there was to tell from the lad's own lips. A little wine soon brought him round, and a sufficient meal restored his strength,

and he was able to speak and explain how he came to be crying in front of the picture shop.

"It was seeing that picture, sir, I think," he said. "It was like going back again to the old place, where we were so happy till—the trouble came, and—"

"Who are you—what is your name?" asked Sir Geoffrey Remington, wondering what he had ever heard about the village represented in the photograph, and who had lived there that he had known.

"My name is Harold Vane," the boy replied. "My father lived at Elm Heath. He was—"

"Not Harold Vane, the artist!"

"Yes."

"Good Heavens! and you, his son, reduced to this!"

"There was nothing for us when he—when he died!" the lad said, with a little shiver. "They took everything, and my mother came to London, and worked till she died, a year ago. I have done whatever I could find to work at since; but I had a fever, and I have been in the hospital, and there seems to be no strength left in me now, and no one wants a boy for anything."

"There, there," Sir Geoffrey said, as the tears came again, "don't cry; that never helped anyone out of a fix yet. Perhaps I may be able to put you in the way of something; anyway, your father's son shall not be left to starve as long as he is willing to work. Harold Vane's son!" he muttered to himself. "The sins of the fathers—surely there is truth in the threat. His sins are resting heavily enough on this poor child's back, if the story be true. It is true; he has Harold's very face!"

A shocking story had been that of Harold Vane—the story of a man with talent that electrified everyone, with a handsome exterior and a gifted mind—a man whose pictures were the talk of the town, and whose society was sought during his brief career as if he were a prince; but who lived recklessly, and spent all he earned faster than it came in, and who ended his career by suicide, leaving a fine crop of debts and not a penny towards the support of his wife and child. No one had heard much of Mrs. Vane. She had kept to the country-place where her reckless husband had established her; and when she had buried her dishonoured dead, had slipped away out of the ken of those who had known her, to fight the world as best she might.

She had relations, it was said; and everybody supposed she had gone to them, wherever they were; but she had gone to struggle with such grinding poverty as she had never imagined in her wildest dreams, and to work beyond her strength, till she sank into her grave, wearied out with the unequal conflict.

"It's all true sir—every word of it," the boy said, when he had finished his story, and Sir Geoffrey felt that it was.

"I should like to help you," he said, "but I hardly see how. You seem to need rest and feeding before you are fit for anything."

"I'm all right now, sir," the boy said. "I was only hungry, that was all!"

"We shall see better to-morrow," the artist said, kindly. "I shall make some inquiries, and if I find you are really what you say, why then you shall not have to lean against shop windows any more to cry. I will find you a better place."

He called a cab and drove home with the boy, to the amazement of his servants and the perplexity of his wife.

"Geoffrey is always doing quixotic things," she said to herself. "I hope he is not going to bring that boy upstairs."

He was not. Harold Vane was consigned to the coachman, who had orders to see that he was taken to a bath, and from thence to a clothier's to be suitably attired and brought before Sir Geoffrey the next morning, the coachman, who had a comfortable little house over the stables, to be responsible for him in the meantime. It was all done, and Harold Vane, in a neat gray suit, with his hair cut and a fresh white collar on, looked every inch a little gentleman when he stood before the artist the next morning to hear what further was to befall him.

Sir Geoffrey had not been idle. He had hunted

up information about Harold Vane's widow and child that corroborated the lad's words, and he had made up his mind to give the son of his old acquaintance a home in his house. He really wanted a boy—someone whom he could train to do various little matters about the studio—and this one seemed light of foot and hand, and could be brought into his ways.

To Harold the interior of the big studio with its artistic untidiness was like a glimpse of Heaven, and every sketch and picture therein a priceless thing to be almost worshipped.

He had been there six months when Sir Geoffrey made a discovery. He had often wondered whether the lad inherited his father's talent; but he had seen nothing to lead him to believe that he did, and he came to the conclusion that the horrible circumstances attending his death, and the subsequent bitter struggle with poverty, had crushed the life out of any aspirations he might have had in the way of art.

The boy had been in his house about six months, and was giving satisfaction in every way, when one morning Sir Geoffrey found a dead bird on his studio table—a robin, an odd thing at that time of year—and he put out his hand to take it up, wondering at its presence. It lay on a piece of board all paint splashes and trial dabs, and the great painter paused a moment, thinking how pretty the little creature looked even in death.

There was no bird there. His hand encountered only a cold, flat surface when he touched the board, and, with a startled exclamation, he rang the bell. Harold Vane came, as usual, looking terribly frightened as he saw what his master held in his hand.

"How came this here!" asked Sir Geoffrey. "Who did it?"

"Please, sir, it is mine," the lad replied. "I forgot it. I haven't touched anything, sir. I was only comparing that brown with some of yours, and I was wanted and I laid it down. I am very sorry!"

"I am glad to have seen it. One of your father's studies, I suppose!"

"No, sir."

"Whose, then?"

"I did it, sir."

"You!"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy; and then, scared at the look in the artist's face, he added, hastily, "but I haven't taken anything, sir. I bought the colours—all of them. Mr. Bathurst gave me half-a-crown, and—"

"Yes, that's all right; I don't doubt you. It is not that. Have you ever done anything else?"

"Yes, sir; a little."

"Go and bring it here—whatever it is. If you truly painted that bird without any assistance or hints from anyone, you have your future in your own hands, my boy, if you'll only study hard enough."

CHAPTER II.

"DEAR Lady Muriel, do not weep so bitterly. Tell me what I can do for you," and the speaker lifted the slight form of a young girl from the floor, where she had sunk in the abandonment of her great sorrow, and made her sit upon a couch and rest amongst the cushions.

"There is nothing," she gasped. "No one can do anything for me—no one can give me back papa!"

She sobbed and moaned in her bitter sorrow, and he stood over her—alone with her for almost the first time, in the confusion of the calamity that had befallen her—feeling that he would give his life, if need be, to spare her this awful agony.

Perhaps in all England there was not a more actually forlorn and helpless girl at that moment than Lady Muriel Claxton, "the daughter of a hundred earls," and yet so poor that she had not a penny she could call her own.

Now that her father was dead not a single thing in all this great mansion belonged to her, and in an hour the birds of prey would be clamouring for their rights in the very shadow and dread presence of death.

It was Harold Vane who was by her side now, the boy whom Sir Geoffrey Remington had rescued from the streets, and who had repaid his kindness and care by rising steadily in his profession till his work went side by side with that of his master and far eclipsed anything his erratic and unlucky father had ever done in his best days.

From the day when the good-hearted Sir Geoffrey discovered his pupil's gift he made him study, and removed him from his somewhat anomalous position, and placed him with a recognised master to study the rudiments of art.

His progress was rapid, and no one rejoiced at it more than his generous friend, who did everything he could to forward his interests.

Harold Vane's rise had been rapid, and there were people spiteful enough to prophesy a speedy downfall.

They said that "having painted one good thing he would never paint another," as is the fashion of such good-natured folks. But he had made no *fiasco*. His afterwork realised the promise of the beginning, and he was acknowledged, young as he was, to be one of the best painters of the day.

He was fashionable, and singularly gifted at catching the expression of anyone whose portrait he undertook; and the Earl of Templestowe, seeing a portrait of his painting insisted that he should paint a portrait of his daughter, the Lady Muriel, one of the most beautiful of society belles.

She had only just been presented, and the fashionable world raved about her—she had hardly made her *début* in society, and her father expected she would make a match that would help him to retrieve his position, which to say the very least of it was well-nigh desperate.

Successive generations of extravagant women and spendthrift men had reduced the revenues of Templestowe to an infinitesimal amount, and the Earl, in spite of outward appearances, was almost a beggar.

Lady Muriel knew nothing of this. She enjoyed her life, little thinking that the very gems she wore, the plate she saw on her father's table, the carriage that she drove about in, were only held on sufferance, as it were, and that at the nod of the men who supplied the money that kept up the establishment they would all take to themselves wings and fly away.

She was delighted to have her portrait painted, and by the man of whom she had heard so much when she went about to exhibitions and studios. She had been taken to his studio on the eve of the last Academy opening, and she had admired with the rest, and had come away remembering the artist's dark eyes and sweet winning voice far better than she remembered his picture.

And now he was to paint her likeness, and she would have to put on her braveries and sit to him now and then, and she would be able to look at him and listen to his voice, and, bah! it was all nonsense; he was only a painter, and she was to marry the Duke of Carnmath—her father had said so. And the duke had been very kind and attentive, and he was so rich.

She must not think any more about Mr. Vane, though he was as handsome as an Apollo, and his voice was so resonant and so sweet at the same time.

—And Harold Vane thought in pretty much the same fashion about the beautiful girl who had looked at his picture, and from it to him so shyly, and said little, but that little a few words of delighted appreciation that had sunk into his heart and stayed there. Sir Geoffrey was rather inclined to advise him to refuse the commission altogether.

"You will never get a farthing," he said. "The Earl has no money; and you will lose other and more profitable commissions, and waste your time and temper. He is a most fastidious man, and never pleased—I speak from experience. I did something for him once, and I vowed then, not if he tempted me with the money down, would I undertake anything at his bidding again."

"In spite of that I think I shall do this," Harold said. "Lady Muriel's is a face to make its painter famous, even if he gets nothing for painting it!"

"And a face to lead a man to forget everything else in the world, my boy!" Sir Geoffrey said, gravely. "Be advised, and keep out of that house. No good can come of it!"

"You are jumping to conclusions," Harold Vane said, with a little laugh and a consciousness that his friend was right. "In this one thing I shall go against your advice. I have set my heart on painting that lovely face. It will haunt me till I have done it!"

"And afterwards, I am afraid," Sir Geoffrey said, as Harold went away. "He's bitten—the lad's in love, and he might as well be in love with the moon. He will come to grief, if he does not mind. I read it in his face and in his eager eyes. He will make a fool of himself, and then—Bah! it's no business of mine! He is a man, and can guide his own steps without my help."

The portrait was nearly finished now, and Sir Geoffrey was right. Harold Vane was in love, as hopelessly as ever mortal could be, knowing right well that his love could bring him naught but misery, and yet lingering over his work, and loth to leave it while he could have the light of Lady Muriel's presence and the glamour of her sweet eyes cast over him.

A terrible ending had come to it now. The Earl, ailing some time, had been stricken down by a fit, and had died without word or sign to the child whom he had loved so dearly.

Whatever might have been his faults (and the Templestows were a faulty race), he had loved and cherished his only child, and shielded her from the faintest shadow of annoyance. And now in one moment the world had changed to her from a luxurious paradise, where everything she wished for came to her as with the wave of a magician's wand, to a cold, blank darkness where there was nothing.

The Earl had died while Harold Vane was in the house—almost in the young artist's presence, for he had been criticising the picture when he was taken ill, and he had stayed on, waiting to see if he could be of any use, and Lady Muriel had come back to the room when all was over, not knowing he was there, and had cast herself on the ground in the abandonment of her grief.

There was no one to wait on her, no one to care for her. It would be everyone for himself in that disorganised household now, and her maid was assisting the housekeeper in the chamber of death. She was dimly conscious that it was the artist who was speaking to her.

"I am taking a liberty, I know," the young man said, after a little pause, during which he had rung the bell, and no one answered it. "But everything seems in confusion. Will you tell me who you would like sent for?"

"There is no one to send for," she replied, her words coming through gasping sobs. "Papa's man has gone for Mr. Claxton—my cousin, you know—and Mr. Gaythorpe. There is no one else."

Mr. Claxton was the heir—Harold Vane knew that much—a fussy, arrogant man, something in the city, and Mr. Gaythorpe, he also knew, was the family lawyer.

"I will wait till they come," he said, with an instinctive forewarning that there were disagreeables at hand. "At any rate, till I can make someone hear to come to you."

"Oh, never mind; they are all busy," Lady Muriel said, helplessly. "I don't want anyone. I only want to be left alone. Oh, papa! papa! why can I not die too!"

She buried her face in the sofa cushions, and he said no more to her. He did not like to go away, for there were ominous sounds as of strangers in the house, and a little crowd outside about the door. The fashionable neighbourhood was likely to be scandalised by the arrival of clamorous creditors unless someone came very soon and put things straight.

"Oh, here she is," a voice said presently, as a heated-looking, overdressed woman threw the door open, and looked into the room, "and a young man with her, I declare! What are her people thinking about? and where is her maid?"

"I cannot answer your questions, madame," the artist said, quietly. "That I am here is

accidental. The Earl's death occurred during Lady Muriel's sitting to me, and I remained to see if I could be of any service to her."

"Certainly not!" the lady said, shortly. "Her friends can do everything that is necessary for her; she has her attendants."

"Hardly," Harold Vane said, with a smile. "I have been endeavouring to make someone hear ever since she returned to this room. Evidently they do not care to answer her bell."

"They will have to answer mine," was the angry response. "I am Mrs. Claxton—that is, Lady Templestowe. My husband succeeds to the title."

"Allow me to congratulate you, madame," the young man said, bowing. "Now that Lady Muriel's friends have arrived I will leave her in their hands. I will only say good-bye to her, and—"

"Leave her alone, sir!" the lady said, irascibly, as he approached the sofa where the girl still lay with her face hidden. "She requires nothing more at your hands. It would have been in better taste if you had not intruded on her sorrow as you have done."

"I shall not intrude, madame. Lady Muriel—dear Lady Muriel—"

He bent low over the sofa as he spoke, and the new Lady Templestowe did not hear the low-spoken words nor the impassioned tone in which they were uttered. Lady Muriel lifted her head, and looked him in the face.

"I am going now," he said. "Your friends have come. I only wanted to say one word to you. Will you think of me if ever you want a friend?—if anything ever happens to make you want one (and we never know what may happen), will you let me help you? I would give my life to aid you, if I need be."

"Thank you," she said, simply, holding out her little hand to him. "I will not forget what you say; I feel as if I should never want anything in this world again—as if I should die, and be buried with papa."

"You will live for happiness, yet, I trust," he said, taking her hand, and touching it with his lips, regardless of the furious looks of the elder lady.

"Sir, you forget yourself!" she said, indignantly; but Harold Vane only bowed to her as he passed her, and went quietly out of the room, and out of the house as well.

"So that's over," Sir Geoffrey said to him when they met that evening at their club. "I hope things are not so bad as is stated. There won't be a farthing for that poor girl, and the new Earl is a stingy fellow. I hear he is furious at the manner in which he declares he has been cheated. The Earl has managed to get rid of a good deal of property he had really no right to sell, and his liabilities are something stupendous."

"And will Lady Muriel have to go and live with them?"

"I expect so. She will have no other home."

"Poor girl!"

"Ay, poor girl, indeed! The new Countess is not of the most refined order of women, and she will visit the sins of her father on her head, especially this last outrage."

"What is that?"

"They have arrested the body. The noble Earl of Templestowe cannot be buried till the claim is settled. It sounds gruesome, and it is only the coarsest of mankind who would resort to such a method of getting payment, but I believe the story is true. The new man tried to hush it up, but it was actually done."

"Horrible!"

"Yes; but I fancy the most horrible part of it to the present Lord Templestowe was the payment that had to be made before the Earl's funeral could be conducted decently. Poor Lady Muriel! she has little chance now of becoming Duchess of Carmath, and the Duke was nearly hooked, they say."

"Will he draw back now?"

"Will he not! The late Earl of Templestowe was a personage, notwithstanding his impetuous state, and a marriage with his daughter meant position and influence. The present man is a nobody, and to marry his penniless niece would

be useless. You don't know the world yet, Harold, my boy, or you would understand all that. Poor girl! she is to be pitied more than the poorest orphan in the kingdom! She is helpless, and friendless, too, I am afraid."

CHAPTER III.

"So that is all over," Harold Vane mused to himself, as he passed the house with the big hatchment over the door, where the girl he loved above all earthly things still lived.

He knew it now; his heart had spoken; and till the grave closed over him, and there was no more of earthly love or grief for him, it would never know another love. A hopeless love he knew it was.

What was he that he should aspire to the daughter of an Earl! In her eyes, perhaps, he was no more than the man who painted the walls of her father's house, or the carpenter who hammered down the floors.

And yet he remembered her gentle looks and words, and told himself that the Lady Muriel did not forget—that she, too, would remember the time when they had met with pleasure, and, perhaps, regret.

But they could never be anything to each other. Her uncle and aunt would be more than ever anxious to make a good match for her, even if the Duke did not come forward. He should never see her again. These new people were not, like her dead father, graciously cordial. Report spoke of them as most exclusive and arrogant, and whispers went abroad that the Lady Muriel was anything but happy under their roof.

All over, indeed, was Harold Vane's foolish love-dream; all over any chance of looking into those sweet eyes again. He was not of the same set as the Earl and his lady; he had no right to knock at their door and ask for their niece. He did do so once, directly after the funeral, and was met with such insolence from the servants that he did not repeat the attempt.

After some time had elapsed he wrote to Lord Templestowe, pointing out that the picture he had been engaged upon was not finished, and that it had been promised for exhibition by the late Earl, etc. For answer he received a command, for it was little else, to call at an appointed time, and was received by Lord Templestowe with much state and ceremony.

He was pompously informed that his lordship did not feel inclined to take upon himself a debt of that sort; there was no occasion for the portrait, and his predecessor had no business to give him the commission.

The Lady Muriel had other duties to attend to and could give him no more sittings. But if he liked to undertake the portraits of the Earl and Countess he could name his terms and fix the time for first sittings.

But for Lady Muriel he would have hung the offer back in the face of the purse-proud man, and left the house. But there might be a chance of seeing her if he accepted the work, and he did so with as good a grace as he could assume, and arranged a time for the sittings to commence.

"You'll get into mischief, dear boy," Sir Geoffrey said, when he was told of the arrangement. "You should have kept away from that house as if the plague were in it. The grapes are too high—you'll break your neck trying to reach them."

"No, I won't; the mischief is done, if there is any. I would paint that arrogant fool and his shrew of a wife for nothing, for one look at Lady Muriel's sweet face, one touch of her soft hand."

"Which they will take very good care you do not get. Be a man, Harold. I used to think you were made of sterner stuff than to whimper after a pretty girl, and spoil your life waiting for the unattainable."

"I am a man," Harold Vane replied. "Who is it that says, 'It is the sting of woe like mine that tells us we are men.' Don't be afraid, old friend; I shall do nothing rash."

And he thought he would not. He went to the house and began the pictures, after much

carvilling about costume, attitude and so forth. And the sittings went on, and the Lady Muriel Claxton might have been in her grave for anything her relatives said about her. Then he mustered courage to ask after her, and was shortly told that she was well. But fortune was going to smile on him even then. The very next time he went to the house he was shown, for some reason or other, into another room.

It was a mistake, but it led him to Muriel. She was sitting there, her head bent over a pile of lace, which she was looking over, and her eyes red with weeping. The room was one evidently but little used, and dreary in the extreme, and there was something sadly forlorn in the attitude and expression of the lonely girl.

It went to Harold's heart to see her. She who had been mistress of all there, whose slightest word was law in the house, evidently doing the work of a lady's maid, and treated as the meanest of her aunt's dependents.

She looked up as he entered the room, and half-rose with a glad cry.

"Mr. Vane!" she exclaimed, and there was joy in every syllable. "You here! what made them bring you to this room?"

"I don't know—was it a mistake? Shall I go away? If I have intruded—"

"Oh, no, no! I am only too glad to see you. I have not seen you since—"

"No, not since that sad time," he replied, taking her hand, which she allowed to rest in his, while he gazed on her lovely downcast face. "Dear Lady Muriel, have you been well—happy? I have so longed for news of you."

"I am well, yes," she answered. "At least, I suppose so. It does not matter much. But happy—ah! no; I shall never be happy again. I have no one in all the wide world to care for me, no one to trouble whether I live or die."

"Yes, one," he said, drawing closer to her, and clasping the hand he held with a tighter clasp that had protection and generous kindness in it, and made her feel, poor girl, that there was a streak of sunshine in the world after all. "One whose only thought is of you, one who would be only too glad to bear it all for you. Ah! do not be angry with me. When the heart is full words will have way, and mine has been full of longing to see you ever since we last met. Tell me of yourself, dear Lady Muriel, and why I find you here in this room at work like this."

"My cousin will not trust her lace to anyone else," Muriel replied, softly, but with a little sigh, "and it saves her something, she says. Papa cheated them, so it is only right I should do what I can."

"And do you do anything else besides mending this stuff?"

"Oh, yes, I attend to her ladyship's correspondence, and do a good deal for the Earl as well in this room. They dislike my going into the library much. Indeed, I do not care to do so myself; it was poor papa's favourite room, and—"

"Do not think of it," Harold Vane said, his heart full of indignation at the thought of the daughter of the house, its lovely mistress, being relegated to a back room and the duties of a companion without the emolument. "Dare I speak to you, Lady Muriel? dare I tell you what is in my heart? what has been there many a day?"

"Say what you like to me, Mr. Vane. You will not say anything unkind, I know."

"Unkind to you! no, Heaven forbid! but you may think it presumptuous."

"I don't think anything you could say to me would be presumptuous; I am sure it would not."

She looked him full in the face with her sweet, sad eyes, and he longed to fling all prudence to the winds and clasp her to his heart with passionate words of love and hope, but he restrained himself, and pressed the little hand that lay in his own so confidently, trying to think how to put in calm words all the tempest of loving longing that filled his heart.

"If you only knew what it is to see the face of a friend," she said, his protecting presence loosening her tongue, and the memory of the times gone by filling her eyes with tears, "you

would not wonder at my being willing to listen to all you have to say to me. I have often thought of you, Mr. Vane, and wondered if we should ever meet again. I do not often go out now to see anyone; indeed, I could not if I wished it. I—"

"You don't mean that! keep you shut up here!" Harold Vane said, with a look of disgust at the dismal room.

"Hardly that, but I have no establishment, no equipage now; and I am so unused to the streets and the ways of the world outside of the house that I do not like going out alone. Don't fancy Lady Templestowe would not take me out with her if I would go," she added, with a smile at the look of indignation in his face. "It is my own fault; I might drive with her most days if I chose, but—"

"But what?"

"I am proud and passionate—at least she says so, and I cannot bear to take the second place where I have been first. It is wicked, I dare say, and Lord Templestowe has reason to be aggrieved at many things. Poor papa didn't consider him in making his own arrangements, and her ladyship is not reticent. When she feels a thing strongly she lets others know it, and sometimes I cannot bear it. My sorrow is too recent."

She spoke gently, but Harold Vane understood it all. He could hear the sharp tongue that never missed a chance of wounding the defenceless orphan, and the arrogant assumption that made every hour a torture to the lonely girl.

"You give me courage to speak by what you have said, Lady Muriel. Will you let me try and bring back some of the brightness to your life? will you trust your happiness to my keeping?"

"To yours, Mr. Vane?"

"Yes; don't think me mad—I am not. I know right well what I am offering you—a life of seclusion and comparative poverty; I cannot give you the luxuries that you have been used to—I mean before your great sorrow," he added, as he saw her glance round at the shabby room at his words, "but I can offer you the faithful love of a devoted heart, and the peace of a home where there shall be nothing to wound you, nothing to touch upon any tender chord. Say I may hope—say you do not hate me for presuming to address you. I must have spoken sometime, even if this blow had not fallen upon you. From the hour when I first looked upon your sweet face there has been no room in my heart for any other image. Whether you say me nay or yea it will hold no other till my life's end."

There was a break in his voice as he pleaded with her, and when he had done his eyes were wet with tears.

"I don't know," she faltered, "you have taken me by surprise. I think—"

"So, my Lady Muriel! so, young man!" and the angry voice of the Countess broke in upon their interview. "I have caught you, have I! Pretty doings for the servants to have to gossip about! Be good enough to leave the house, sir! And you, my lady, if you want to make assignments with your beggarly lover go after him—you shall not do it here."

The world was right in saying that Lady Templestowe was a vulgar woman. She could scold like any charwoman in her cups, and Harold Vane saw Lady Muriel wince as if she had been struck under the lash of her violent tongue. It was no use to talk to her. She was ablaze with passion, and making noise enough to bring the servants round the door in a curious and interested group, and to rouse the Earl in his study from the perusal of the daily paper. To him, as he entered the room, Harold Vane turned, and told him quietly of the mistake that had been made in showing him into that room, and how he had asked the Lady Muriel to be his wife.

"And by what right do you do such a thing?" the Earl asked, almost as angry as his wife, though without her violence. "How dare you?"

"I should not be a man had I not dared," was the quiet reply. "I love her. I dared to love her when she was mistress of this house, where I find her doing the work of a servant, exposed to all the indignities that small minds and spiteful

natures can inflict on her. I love her more than ever in her sorrow, and I have asked her whether she will share my life and let me make amends to her for the suffering that is her portion in your house."

"You talk like a mad fool," Lord Templestowe replied, haughtily; "the Lady Muriel suffers no indignities here—and I have other views for her. She will marry as befits her rank, not a man whose mode of living is as precarious as a travelling tinkler. I beg you will leave the house at once, and enter it no more. I will forward a cheque for what you have already done to your studio."

"I beg you will do no such thing," the young artist said, as haughtily as the Earl himself had spoken. "I will leave your house, my lord, but I will have my answer first. You have no legal right to prevent Lady Muriel doing as she likes; you are not her guardian."

He had never loosed the hold he had of the little white hand, and it seemed to him that it returned his clasp just a little, and Muriel lifted her eyes to his face.

"She shall not decide," the Earl said, passionately. "She has nothing to do with it."

"I have decided," said Muriel, her voice sounding clear and firm amidst the tempest of passion that was raging round her. "Mr. Vane has asked me to marry him, and I—I—have accepted his offer. He is right, you are not my guardian, Lord Templestowe; there is nothing for you to guard. I shall come to you a penniless wife, Harold."

Her courage gave way now. She trembled, and but for his supporting arm she would have fallen, and Harold turned to the Earl and Countess with a triumphant face.

"You hear her, my lord!" he said; "she has chosen."

"Yes, I hear," was the short reply. "I have wasted time through this nonsense. I wish you joy of your aristocratic wife, Mr. Vane, and I shall be obliged if you will at once take measures for her removal from my house. I wash my hands of her from this hour."

CHAPTER IV.

"HAROLD, dear."

There was no answer for a minute, and Harold Vane's wife stole to his side and laid her hand on his arm. His wife—more lovely now in her simple dress and amidst her artistic surroundings than she had been in her magnificent home, with all the appurtenances of her rank and state about her. The Lady Muriel Claxton was well-nigh forgotten by the frivolous world of fashion—the nine days' wonder of her romantic marriage, and her uncle's wrath therewith was a thing of the past—and she had spent three happy years under her husband's roof sheltered by his great love.

Two sorrows had come to them since the day when they had sworn at the altar to be all the world to each other till death should separate them. Their little child had only come "to see the light and leave it," and their good friend Sir Geoffrey Remington had laid down his brush and pencil for ever and passed through the golden gates while the glory of his fame was still at its brightest.

He was getting old. He had slipped from the prime of his manhood, past middle life, without anyone ever thinking that his genius could dim or his hand lose its cunning. And when at length they found him dead amidst the great creations of his pencil and brush—sleeping to wake no more in the great chair by his studio fire—his friends were clamorously sorrowful that he had been taken from them so soon.

None mourned him more sincerely than the boy whose future he had secured, and whose life he had made; however much he had deplored Harold's marriage—and he had looked upon it as a great mistake—he had come to love Lady Muriel as if she had been his own child, and had purposed to leave her a considerable sum of money. It was not to be; like many men of sterling worth and goodness he had put off altering his will as he meant to do, and Harold Vane's wife

was left out. The artist himself was down for a considerable sum, and no one but himself knew how badly it was wanted.

Harold Vane was not exactly an extravagant man, but he was a careless one; a favourite with the public, commissions poured in upon him till he could pick and choose his work, and money seemed as if it would have no end. Everything that he could give his young wife he did. He could not give her her old place in society nor all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed, but he could take her about and surround her with all the comforts that any woman could wish for, and make her home a thing of beauty, and her life a very heaven after the coldness and contumely of her cousin's home.

But fantastic furniture and venetian drapery and all the artistic surroundings so fashionable of late years cost money, and it takes many pictures and high prices paid for them to pay the cost of indulging the tastes of a gentleman, and finding the necessary comforts for a fastidious lady. Lady Muriel knew nothing of what was troubling her husband. She had no more idea now of the cost of things than she had had in her father's house, when nothing of a disagreeable nature ever came near her—she took her comfortable home and her carriage as things of course, and did not imagine how many weary hours of work it cost to pay even the interest of the money that her luxuries were worth.

A dream of heaven her life with Harold had been—she never missed the society that had been hers when they first met. The miserable time that had passed after her father's death had separated her from all her old friends, and the only one of them that had not forgotten her was her old suitor, the Duke of Carnmath.

He had not married; he must marry money or influence when he did sacrifice himself, and he had never seen any woman who had come up to Lady Muriel in his eyes. He had never exactly loved her; if he had he would not have given her up so easily, and would have had more of a heart-ache when he heard of the step she had taken in marrying the artist.

"Picky girl," was all the remark he made. "We must do something for them."

And he had done a great deal in a quiet way. He had been the means of getting Harold Vane a good many commissions that he little guessed at; any other aid could not have been offered.

But what the Duke did in a quiet way sent money into the artist's purse in a fashion that helped to make him careless and forgetful that there would come a stem to the tide of good fortune some time.

It was coming now. Creditors were beginning to be clamorous for their dues, and he was thinking wearily of a bill he had to meet when Muriel startled him by her address.

"What is it, darling?" he asked, and there was something like a sob in his voice as he spoke. She had caught him unawares; for the moment he had been oblivious of her presence, and was absorbed in his own thoughts.

"What are you thinking of—you look so grave!"

"I was feeling grave, dear."

"Why?"

Alas! there were many reasons why—his money troubles and others of which his wife knew nothing. He spoke the uppermost that was in his thoughts.

"I have been annoyed, little one."

"Annoyed. With me?"

"Not with you—about you, wife."

Lady Muriel looked terrified. There was a look in her husband's eyes that she had never seen there before.

"About me?" she said, drawing a little away from him. "How?"

"Don't look so scared," he said, gently bending down his head and kissing her. "I want you to let his Grace of Carnmath's acquaintance drop, that is all. I have heard some society gossip to-day that has made me want to punch someone's head, and it arose out of my wife's friendship with that gentleman."

"But Carnmath has been so kind," Muriel pleaded. "He—"

"Yes, I know, dear; but the kindness of a man

to the woman he once wanted to marry, and who has made a downward step in the world through her own choice, is apt to be misconstrued."

"I think I understand," Lady Muriel said, her full red lips quivering.

She had not heard a breath of what her husband was alluding to, which, after all, was what he designated it, "society gossip," but she knew perfectly well what had been said; she had heard enough in her former life to know how spiteful people can be, and she had no doubt that Harold had been taunted with accepting the patronage of his wife's former lover.

It was so, and the person from whom the taunt had come had been Lord Templestowe, the man above all others who should have said a word in defence of his young kinswoman.

He had never forgiven her the marriage with an artist, whereby he chose to assert that the family dignity was dragged through the mire, and he never missed an opportunity of shrugging his shoulders and hinting more than he chose to say in her disparagement.

Harold Vane had been stung to the quick only that morning by something that had been said at his club, and he had come home resolving to forbid Muriel having anything more to do with his Grace of Carnmath.

"I am sorry," she said; "it is so difficult to cut an old friend."

"It must be done," her husband said, rather shortly. "I cannot have my affairs discussed in every club in London. I might have known what his philandering here would lead to."

"Harold!"

Muriel had never heard an impatient word from her husband before, and she began to think that he must have gone suddenly mad. She had been guilty of no impropriety that she knew of, and his tonesounded accusing, and even angry. He was penitent in a moment, and by her side, for she had gone away from him, stung by his tone.

"Forgive me, darling," he said, "but I am worried by other things besides that. We can find a way to stop these slanderous tongues and—"

"What other worries, Harold! What is troubling you? Am I so little your wife that you cannot tell me?"

"It is nothing that you could understand, my own. Money troubles—a bill. Your father had plenty of them, had he not?"

"I don't think poor papa troubled himself much about them," Lady Muriel said, with a sigh. "Mr. Gaythorpe managed all that sort of thing. Are we in debt, Harold?"

"Just a little, dear," he replied, with a smile and a secret shiver as he thought how many thousand pounds it would take to cover his liabilities. "I have not counted the cost quite correctly, that is all."

"But we can save, surely," she said, in astonishment. "We do not want such a large house, nor a carriage, nor many things. Ah! Harold, darling, I see it all now. You have been sacrificing yourself, your health, your life almost for me. I have thought you pale and worried of late. Heartless that I was, I never guessed the real cause!"

"She does not guess it now," Harold Vane said to himself, passing his hand over his eyes, as if the light were too strong for them; "she does not know; all the rest is as nothing to this."

"You had nothing to do with it, little woman," he said, with affected cheerfulness, "the muddle has been all of my own making; and as for Carnmath, we can manage that somehow. Don't worry about it, he will be sensible enough to understand that I don't mean to insult him, only to preserve my wife's name from insult. Here he comes."

"I will go, Harold; I cannot be a party to this thing"—and Muriel's gentle voice was full of indignation. "If I am to meet the Duke of Carnmath no more as a friend I will not see him at all. You and everybody else wrong both me and him, and you will be sure of it some day. He may not be very brilliant, but he is a true friend, and one whose friendship it would be well not to throw away."

And before Harold had time to answer she had left the room, and the servant was announcing the Duke of Carnmath.

"Hey day! what's the matter!" that nobleman asked, as he came into the room. "Lady Muriel passed me on the staircase, and if there were not tears in her eyes I never saw them in any woman's; and you look as if—"

"As if I had quarrelled with my wife, your Grace, was that what you thought?"

"No, hardly that; you would not quarrel with Muriel. I beg your pardon, with Lady Muriel," the Duke said, warned off the familiar name by something he saw in Harold Vane's face; "nobody could quarrel with her, you know."

"I certainly could not, but we have had the nearest approach to high words that ever happened between us; and your Grace was the cause."

"I was?"

"Just so."

"And how? Who has dared to say or do anything to make me a cause of uneasiness to the Lady Muriel or to you?"

"Gossip, your Grace; if you had not come here to-day I was going to seek you to ask you to—not to—that is—I—"

"I think I can guess," the Duke said, with more dignity than Harold Vane had ever seen him display before. "You were going to tell me that my visits at your house, and my attentions to your wife were unacceptable, is that so?"

"It is."

"I came here with somewhat different motives, for I had two," the visitor said, quietly. "The first was to ask you and Lady Muriel to come to the *fête* with me to-morrow; I have tickets for you, and a box for the fireworks; however, that is all nonsense now; if we are to be strangers henceforth you will hardly care to be seen with me then. I had another motive, pardon my alluding to the subject, but the bill that you have to meet to-day, I have heard of it."

"Who has dared to talk of my private affairs?"

"Everybody pretty much; they are no secret, at any rate, to the money-lending fraternity; you are pressed for this one?"

"I am."

"Ah! I thought so; then make your mind easy. Is this it?"

He produced a paper from his pocket-book, and held it out to Harold Vane, whose lips quivered as he looked at it and thought of how many headaches and how many sleepless nights the thought of it had cost him.

"Yes," he said. "I am sorry to see it in your possession, your Grace."

"I shall not be an exacting creditor," the duke said, twisting up the bill and thrusting it into the fire which was burning. Though the day was bright outside, Harold Vane had been chilly and out of sorts of late, and apt to complain of cold in the warmest weather. "If your wife knows anything about it, it is a present to her. If she does not, be thankful there is an end of it, and paint me a picture some day when you have plenty of time."

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a moment's pause as the two men faced each other, with the flickering flame dying away between them, and then the duke spoke.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, "I should not have done it, perhaps; but I wanted to help you, indeed I did."

He saw the jealous agony in the face of Muriel's husband, for Harold Vane was jealous; the vile gossip of the clubs had struck home, and he could not believe that what his former rival had told him was true, that it was only friendship that brought him to the house, and coupled his name with that of Lord Templestowe's daughter.

"I am your debtor, my lord, instead of anyone else's," he said, somewhat stiffly. "I am afraid you will have to trust to my honour for the time of payment, but it shall be as quickly as possible;

cavilling about costume, attitude and so forth. And the sittings went on, and the Lady Muriel Claxton might have been in her grave for anything her relatives said about her. Then he mustered courage to ask after her, and was shortly told that she was well. But fortune was going to smile on him even then. The very next time he went to the house he was shown, for some reason or other, into another room.

It was a mistake, but it led him to Muriel. She was sitting there, her head bent over a pile of lace, which she was looking over, and her eyes red with weeping. The room was one evidently but little used, and dreary in the extreme, and there was something sadly forlorn in the attitude and expression of the lonely girl.

He went to Harold's heart to see her. She who had been mistress of all there, whose slightest word was law in the house, evidently doing the work of a lady's maid, and treated as the meanest of her aunt's dependents.

She looked up as he entered the room, and half-rose with a glad cry.

"Mr. Vane!" she exclaimed, and there was joy in every syllable. "You here! what made them bring you to this room?"

"I don't know—was it a mistake? Shall I go away? If I have intruded—"

"Oh, no, no! I am only too glad to see you. I have not seen you since—"

"No, not since that sad time," he replied, taking her hand, which she allowed to rest in his, while he gazed on her lovely downcast face. "Dear Lady Muriel, have you been well—happy? I have so longed for news of you."

"I am well, yes," she answered. "At least, I suppose so. It does not matter much. But happy—ah! no; I shall never be happy again. I have no one in all the wide world to care for me, no one to trouble whether I live or die."

"Yes, one," he said, drawing closer to her, and clasping the hand he held with a tighter clasp that had protection and generous kindness in it, and made her feel, poor girl, that there was a streak of sunshine in the world after all. "One whose only thought is of you, one who would be only too glad to bear it all for you. Ah! I do not be angry with me. When the heart is full of words will have way, and mine has been full of longing to see you ever since we last met. Tell me of yourself, dear Lady Muriel, and why I find you here in this room at work like this."

"My cousin will not trust her lace to anyone else," Muriel replied, softly, but with a little sigh, "and it saves her something, she says. Papa cheated them, so it is only right I should do what I can."

"And do you do anything else besides mending this stuff?"

"Oh, yes, I attend to her ladyship's correspondence, and do a good deal for the Earl as well in this room. They dislike my going into the library much. Indeed, I do not care to do so myself; it was poor papa's favourite room, and—"

"Do not think of it," Harold Vane said, his heart full of indignation at the thought of the daughter of the house, its lovely mistress, being relegated to a back room and the duties of a companion without the emolument. "Dare I speak to you, Lady Muriel? dare I tell you what is in my heart? What has been there many a day?"

"Say what you like to me, Mr. Vane. You will not say anything unkind, I know."

"Unkind to you! no, Heaven forbid! but you may think it presumptuous."

"I don't think anything you could say to me would be presumptuous; I am sure it would not."

She looked him full in the face with her sweet, sad eyes, and he longed to fling all prudence to the winds and clasp her to his heart with passionate words of love and hope, but he restrained himself, and pressed the little hand that lay in his own so confidently, trying to think how to put in calm words all the tempest of loving longing that filled his heart.

"If you only knew what it is to see the face of a friend," she said, his protecting presence loosening her tongue, and the memory of the times gone by filling her eyes with tears, "you

would not wonder at my being willing to listen to all you have to say to me. I have often thought of you, Mr. Vane, and wondered if we should ever meet again. I do not often go out now to see anyone; indeed, I could not if I wished it. I—"

"You don't mean that th keep you shut up here!" Harold Vane said, with a look of disgust at the dismal room.

"Hardly that, but I have no establishment, no equipage now; and I am so unused to the streets and the ways of the world outside of the house that I do not like going out alone. Don't fancy Lady Templestowe would not take me out with her if I would go," she added, with a smile at the look of indignation in his face. "It is my own fault; I might drive with her most days if I chose, but—"

"But what?"

"I am proud and passionate—at least she says so, and I cannot bear to take the second place where I have been first. It is wicked, I daresay, and Lord Templestowe has reason to be aggrieved at many things. Poor papa didn't consider him in making his own arrangements, and her ladyship is not reticent. When she feels a thing strongly she lets others know it, and sometimes I cannot bear it. My sorrow is too recent."

She spoke gently, but Harold Vane understood it all. He could hear the sharp tongue that never missed a chance of wounding the defenceless orphan, and the arrogant assumption that made every hour a torture to the lonely girl.

"You give me courage to speak by what you have said, Lady Muriel. Will you let me try and bring back some of the brightness to your life? will you trust your happiness to my keeping?"

"To yours, Mr. Vane?"

"Yes; don't think me mad—I am not. I know right well what I am offering you—a life of seclusion and comparative poverty; I cannot give you the luxuries that you have been used to—I mean before your great sorrow," he added, as he saw her glance round at the shabby room at his words, "but I can offer you the faithful love of a devoted heart, and the peace of a home where there shall be nothing to wound you, nothing to touch upon any tender chord. Say I may hope—say you do not hate me for presuming to address you. I must have spoken sometime, even if this blow had not fallen upon you. From the hour when I first looked upon your sweet face there has been no room in my heart for any other image. Whether you say me nay or yea it will hold no other till my life's end."

There was a break in his voice as he pleaded with her, and when he had done his eyes were wet with tears.

"I don't know," she faltered, "you have taken me by surprise. I think—"

"So, my Lady Muriel! so, young man!" and the angry voice of the Countess broke in upon their interview. "I have caught you, have I! Pretty doings for the servants to have to gossip about! Be good enough to leave the house, sir! And you, my lady, if you want to make assignments with your beggarly lover go after him—you shall not do it here."

The world was right in saying that Lady Templestowe was a vulgar woman. She could scold like any charwoman in her cups, and Harold Vane saw Lady Muriel wince as if she had been struck under the lash of her violent tongue. It was no use to talk to her. She was ablaze with passion, and making noise enough to bring the servants round the door in a curious and interested group, and to rouse the Earl in his study from the perusal of the daily paper. To him, as he entered the room, Harold Vane turned, and told him quietly of the mistake that had been made in showing him into that room, and how he had asked the Lady Muriel to be his wife.

"And by what right do you do such a thing?" the Earl asked, almost as angry as his wife, though without her violence. "How dare you?"

"I should not be a man had I not dared," was the quiet reply. "I love her. I dared to love her when she was mistress of this house, where I find her doing the work of a servant, exposed to all the indignities that small minds and spiteful

natures can inflict on her. I love her more than ever in her sorrow, and I have asked her whether she will share my life and let me make amends to her for the suffering that is her portion in your house."

"You talk like a mad fool," Lord Templestowe replied, haughtily; "the Lady Muriel suffers no indignities here—and I have other views for her. She will marry as befits her rank, not a man whose mode of living is as precarious as a travelling tinker. I beg you will leave the house at once, and enter it no more. I will forward a cheque for what you have already done to your studio."

"I beg you will do no such thing," the young artist said, as haughtily as the Earl himself had spoken. "I will leave your house, my lord, but I will have my answer first. You have no legal right to prevent Lady Muriel doing as she likes; you are not her guardian."

He had never loosed the hold he had of the little white hand, and it seemed to him that it returned his clasp just a little, and Muriel lifted her eyes to his face.

"She shall not decide," the Earl said, passionately. "She has nothing to do with it."

"I have decided," said Muriel, her voice sounding clear and firm amidst the tempest of passion that was raging round her. "Mr. Vane has asked me to marry him, and I—I—have accepted his offer. He is right, you are not my guardian, Lord Templestowe; there is nothing for you to guard. I shall come to you a penniless wife, Harold."

Her courage gave way now. She trembled, and but for his supporting arm she would have fallen, and Harold turned to the Earl and Countess with a triumphant face.

"You hear her, my lord!" he said; "she has chosen."

"Yes, I hear," was the short reply. "I have wasted time through this nonsense. I wish you joy of your aristocratic wife, Mr. Vane, and I shall be obliged if you will at once take measures for her removal from my house. I wash my hands of her from this hour."

CHAPTER IV.

"HAROLD, dear."

There was no answer for a minute, and Harold Vane's wife stole to his side and laid her hand on his arm. His wife—more lovely now in her simple dress and amidst her artistic surroundings than she had been in her magnificent home, with all the appurtenances of her rank and state about her. The Lady Muriel Claxton was well-nigh forgotten by the frivolous world of fashion—the nine days' wonder of her romantic marriage, and her uncle's wrath therewith was a thing of the past—and she had spent three happy years under her husband's roof sheltered by his great love.

Two sorrows had come to them since the day when they had sworn at the altar to be all the world to each other till death should separate them. Their little child had only come "to see the light and leave it," and their good friend Sir Geoffrey Remington had laid down his brush and pencil for ever and passed through the golden gates while the glory of his fame was still at its brightest.

He was getting old. He had slipped from the prime of his manhood, past middle life, without anyone ever thinking that his genius could dim or his hand lose its cunning. And when at length they found him dead amidst the great creations of his pencil and brush—asleep to wake no more in the great chair by his studio fire—his friends were clamorously sorrowful that he had been taken from them so soon.

None mourned him more sincerely than the boy whose future he had secured, and whose life he had made; however much he had deplored Harold's marriage—and he had looked upon it as a great mistake—he had come to love Lady Muriel as if she had been his own child, and had purposed to leave her a considerable sum of money. It was not to be; like many men of sterling worth and goodness he had put off altering his will as he meant to do, and Harold Vane's wife

was left out. The artist himself was down for a considerable sum, and no one but himself knew how badly it was wanted.

Harold Vane was not exactly an extravagant man, but he was a careless one; a favourite with the public, commissions poured in upon him till he could pick and choose his work, and money seemed as if it would have no end. Everything that he could give his young wife he did. He could not give her her old place in society nor all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed, but he could take her about and surround her with all the comforts that any woman could wish for, and make her home a thing of beauty, and her life a very heaven after the coldness and contumely of her cousin's home.

But fantastic furniture and venetian drapery and all the artistic surroundings so fashionable of late years cost money, and it takes many pictures and high prices paid for them to pay the cost of indulging the tastes of a gentleman, and finding the necessary comforts for a fastidious lady. Lady Muriel knew nothing of what was troubling her husband. She had no more idea now of the cost of things than she had had in her father's house, when nothing of a disagreeable nature ever came near her—she took her comfortable home and her carriage as things of course, and did not imagine how many weary hours of work it cost to pay even the interest of the money that her luxuries were worth.

A dream of heaven her life with Harold had been—she never missed the society that had been hers when they first met. The miserable time that had passed after her father's death had separated her from all her old friends, and the only one of them that had not forgotten her was her old suitor, the Duke of Carnmath.

He had not married; he must marry money or influence when he did sacrifice himself, and he had never seen any woman who had come up to Lady Muriel in his eyes. He had never exactly loved her; if he had he would not have given her up so easily, and would have had more of a heart-ache when he heard of the step she had taken in marrying the artist.

"Plucky girl," was all the remark he made. "We must do something for them."

And he had done a great deal in a quiet way. He had been the means of getting Harold Vane a good many commissions that he little guessed at; any other aid could not have been offered.

But what the Duke did in a quiet way sent money into the artist's purse in a fashion that helped to make him careless and forgetful that there would come a stem to the tide of good fortune some time.

It was coming now. Creditors were beginning to be clamorous for their dues, and he was thinking wearily of a bill he had to meet when Muriel startled him by her address.

"What is it, darling?" he asked, and there was something like a sob in his voice as he spoke. She had caught him unawares; for the moment he had been oblivious of her presence, and was absorbed in his own thoughts.

"What are you thinking of—you look so grave!"

"I was feeling grave, dear."

"Why?"

Alas! there were many reasons why—his money troubles and others of which his wife knew nothing. He spoke the uppermost that was in his thoughts.

"I have been annoyed, little one."

"Annoyed. With me?"

"Not with you—about you, wife."

Lady Muriel looked terrified. There was a look in her husband's eyes that she had never seen there before.

"About me?" she said, drawing a little away from him. "How?"

"Don't look so scared," he said, gently bending down his head and kissing her. "I want you to let his Grace of Carnmath's acquaintance drop, that is all. I have heard some society gossip to-day that has made me want to punch someone's head, and it arose out of my wife's friendship with that gentleman."

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"What other worries, Harold! What is troubling you? Am I so little your wife that you cannot tell me?"

"It is nothing that you could understand, my own. Money troubles—a bill. Your father had plenty of them, had he not?"

"I don't think poor papa troubled himself much about them," Lady Muriel, said, with a sigh: "Mr. Gaythorpe managed all that sort of thing. Are we in debt, Harold?"

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"I certainly could not, but we have had the nearest approach to high words that ever happened between us; and your Grace was the cause."

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"I am your debtor, my lord, instead of anyone else's," he said, somewhat stiffly. "I am afraid you will have to trust to my honour for the time of payment, but it shall be as quickly as possible;

you have saved me and Muriel from the unpleasantness of having to break up our home, in all probability; and—"

His voice broke for a moment, and the young man gazing at him, wondered what else there could be that was troubling him; there was more in his face of secret misery than even the uncomfortable scandal and the shortness of money could account for, a different expression than either of these would have called up.

"Don't think of it," he said, kindly, "don't let it trouble you for a moment; excuse me for interfering in your affairs at all, but I did want to give the lie to some of those idle rumours about your money matters. There is something else, I can see there is, not money, what is it, can anyone help you?"

"No one, your Grace, I am deeply grateful for what you have done, at any rate; it will save my wife from much annoyance, and as you said, it shall be a debt of honour; the first to be paid."

His tone was so studiously cold that his visitor could say no more, and he prepared to take his leave, feeling more chilled and disappointed than he would have liked to acknowledge, and, but for meeting Muriel as he went downstairs, he would have gone away with a resolve never to trouble the artist any more. She was waiting for him in the hall, and drew him into her dainty little morning-room.

"I cannot let you go like this," she said to him. "I said I would not see you, or have anything to do with the silly nonsense that seems almost to have turned poor Harold's head. I wanted to say good-bye, and thank you for all your goodness to us. I am sure you have been helping Harold in some way, and—"

"I am afraid he does not think it a help," the Duke said, smiling. "I have been a little too officious. It was a matter that was worrying him; he acknowledged as much, and worry is bad for artists and people who have only their brains to help them on in the world."

"I am afraid it is money," Muriel said, sorrowfully. "He is extravagant for me. I do not know how to manage things like women who have been differently brought up. He thinks I do not know, my poor darling, but I can see how he struggles and works, and I can do nothing to help him. Something is troubling him too besides money. I heard him say one day that 'death would be preferable.' What could he mean?"

"I wouldn't worry myself about it if I were you, dear Lady Muriel," the Duke said, gently, thinking to himself what a jealous idiot Harold Vane must be, and how obtuse to doubt his loving, gentle wife. "He is perhaps a little over-worked, or he cannot do just what he wants with his brush, and that of itself is enough to make a sensitive mind all at thorns, as it were. Very likely a few weeks will see him all right again. See here, Lady Muriel, I am a stupid fellow, and not good for much in the world, I know. Our pleasant acquaintance must cease, for I would not for the world do anything to make discomfort here, and as Vane says, people will talk. But don't forget this, if ever you want a friend, one who can really help you if you need it, don't forget me. I shall never forget you, and some day Mr. Vane will know us both better. I think he really does now, but he is evidently suffering, and his nerves are irritable beyond his control."

"That is it; he is ill, I am sure of it, and he will not tell me. Oh! if he should die! what should I do—what should I do?"

"He is not going to die yet, dear Lady Muriel. Do not look so troubled. Whatever it is that is on his mind, and there is something I feel sure that has made him so hasty and inclined to look on the blackest side of things, will pass away. He is, as you say, a little troubled about money matters, and I have not taken quite the right way to help him."

The very best, had he known it. He had saved the touchy artist from the scandal of having his goods seized, and had managed it in such a fashion that no one knew anything about it except themselves.

Lady Muriel felt as if she had lost a dear

friend when he had lifted her hand to his lips and gone out of the house.

"Harold must be beside himself to have such thoughts," she said to herself, and then she went back to the studio to find her husband crouching in the big chair that he loved to lounge in when he was "thinking out" his work, as he called it, weeping like a woman, with gasping, passionate sobs that terrified her extremely. She did not scream or ring the bell, but quietly fastened the door that no one might come in unawares, and then stood beside him, trembling with fright and agitation, till he should be able to speak to her.

He never knew that she had been watching him; he was lying quiet with his face hidden when she laid her hand on his shoulder.

Her face was very white, for she had caught a few words dropped in his misery that had gone to her heart. He had sobbed out a passionate prayer that he might die; he, her gifted, handsome Harold, had begged the Providence that rules this lower world to take him from it before—before what? What was coming upon her and him? It was not money troubles; he was hardly the man to let anything of that sort overcome him so completely. What dread calamity did he anticipate?

She had been so utterly unconscious that she had never guessed; she had never seen him pass his weary hand over his still more weary eyes in the vain attempt to clear them from the mist that too often came over them when he was at work.

Harold Vane had had a new and awful fear come over him during the past season—a fear that he should lose his sight altogether, that like Samson he should go blind in the very heyday of his strength and success.

"Harold, what is it?"

The voice of his wife roused him from the trance of grief and horrible anticipation that he had fallen into, and he started, and looked at her.

(To be continued.)

THE UNCLE'S SECRET.

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(Continued from page 224.)

"Nothing could ever change my heart toward him, unless it was to love him more and more—my handsome hero, my noble lover! And to think that he loves me as well and as truly as I love him is the sweetest assurance my heart can know," she mused.

There was no sleep within the walls of Lexmore Hall that night; each member of the family was waiting a summons from the sick-room.

Connie wrapped a fleecy white shawl about her shoulders, and sat down at the open window to watch the beauty of the night, and to indulge in those fanciful dreams so sweet to young girls.

Harold Lexmore had asked her to marry him, and she had pledged herself to do so; yet he had spoken no word of love to her. In her simple, childish heart, Connie, who knew so little of the world, quite believed this must be the usual fashion of wooing—young men probably never spoke of love until after they were betrothed.

Perhaps that wooing was best. But a longing came over her to hear her handsome lover whisper low, tender words to her—to see his blue eyes brighten as she approached—to have him speak the words, "I love you, Connie!"

With a beautiful, girlish blush at her own sweet fancies, Connie gathered the white, fleecy scarf closer about her shoulders, rose, and hastily quitted the room, walking quickly and with noiseless footsteps in the direction of the library, that she might be near at hand in case the major should call for her.

In the meantime, in the western wing of the spacious old mansion, quite a different and thrilling scene was transpiring.

When Mrs. Kinder and her daughter had entered the house, on Winnie's being told she could not see Harold Lexmore just then, she went up to her room.

Mrs. Kinder was more diplomatic, however. She had gone at once to the major's bedside, and there she learned of the event which had taken place but a few short moments previous.

A shriek of amazement, chagrin, and bitter disappointment trembled on her lips. Constance Culver—that beggar, that upstart—betrothed to Harold Lexmore, the man who but one short week before, with all his great prospective wealth, had been almost as good as engaged to her daughter Winnie! Oh, unlucky summer trip! Oh, why had she taken Winnie to the seaside and left that girl here, with her dark, alluring eyes and pretty face? How should she break the terrible news to Winnie, whose life-long dream had been to reign supreme as the mistress of Lexmore Hall? And to make the matter worse, the girl loved Harold Lexmore with all the passionate ardour of her nature, and she had quite believed the attachment was mutual.

She never remembered what excuse she made to leave the major's bedside, or how she gained her daughter's room.

Winnie sprang to her mother's side as she saw her standing, white and trembling, on the threshold. She knew at once something had happened.

"What is the matter, mamma?" she cried. "Is the major dead?"

There was no love or anxiety in her careless tone—simply curiosity. Mrs. Kinder shook her head; she was afraid to tell her. The girl stood still a moment, her grey eyes dilating, her face blanching.

"He hasn't made a will leaving anything to that hated Connie that should belong to Harold and me, has he?" she asked, breathlessly.

"No—it is worse than that," answered her mother.

"Is it about Harold?" she asked, searching her mother's face with those strange, burning grey eyes.

"Yes; I have heard something about him which I dread to tell you, Winnie. You love him so well the shock might kill you."

"Tell me what it is; I can bear anything but suspense. Is he ill? If so, I will go to him; no one has a better right than I have."

"It is not that," replied her mother; "it is something quite different. He is well; but oh, how shall I tell you that which must wreck your whole life—lay your hopes and your love in ruins!"

"You frighten me, mamma! It were better to tell me at once than keep me in suspense," returned Winnie, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Listen, then, my poor child," returned her mother, pityingly. "During the few weeks we have been away this girl, Constance Culver, whom we left at Lexmore Hall a poor, miserable, dependent creature, has stolen your lover, Harold Lexmore, from you, and less than an hour ago they were betrothed to each other at the major's bedside. It would have been a marriage had the girl been a year older."

A low, bitter, lingering cry fell from Winnie's lips—a cry terrible to hear. Then she turned, and, with a quick motion, attempted to fly from the room, eluding the hand that was outstretched to detain her.

"Winnie," cried her mother, warningly, "what would you do? Remember you must do nothing rash; for you and I, much as it hurts my pride and yours to remind you of it, are here upon your uncle's charity. If you raise a scene we shall be turned out into the street. Oh, Winnie, do nothing rash!"

"Let me alone!" screamed her daughter, fiercely. "Do you think it is in my nature to stand calmly by and see that girl take the lover away from me who has sworn a thousand times or more that he loved me and me alone! I—I would kill her first! Betrothed they may be; but he is not lost to me until the marriage knot is tied."

"Be wise and prudent," again urged Mrs. Kinder. "I feel this as deeply and keenly as you

do, but I must cover the bitter anger in my heart with smiles. It will be hard to do, but I intend to go to Harold Lexmore and Constance to-morrow morning and congratulate them."

"I, on the contrary, will upbraid them!" shouted the wrathful beauty. "Ah! fatal was the hour when I pleaded with Major Lexmore to forgive his son and not disinherit him. I thought it would all be mine in time—all mine and Harold's."

Major Lexmore lay alone in his dimly lighted chamber. He had requested to be left thus an hour or more, in anticipation of Connie's return. The doctor had given him a strong cordial, and retired within an inner room.

Slowly the moments passed, they seemed like ages to the pain-racked sufferer on the silken couch.

"Why does Connie not come!" he murmured. "Great Heaven! what if she should come too late! I dare not think what the consequences would be! It was well I did not use my strongest and greatest reason for urging this betrothal. I knew best. Connie—poor little wronged Connie—shall know the secret of the oak bound chest; and when I am laid to rest, where the terrible anger of men or the scorn of women cannot harm me, Connie shall tell my son all, if she thinks best. Then he will know why it was best that he should marry Connie instead of that plotting, planning, avaricious Winnie Kinder."

A quick step broke in upon his confused thought. A form glided up to his bedside.

"Connie—little Connie!" gasped the major, with a glad, gasping cry. "Thank Heaven, you have come before it is too late!"

Winnie was just on the point of exclaiming, angrily: "It is not Connie, the miserable beggar who has cheated me out of my lover; it is I—Winnie." The next sentence he uttered froze the words on her lips.

The room was dark, and the dim eyes of the man lying back among the pillows were closed. He could not bear the gaze of the girl's startled eyes upon his face as he told her what he had to say.

"Turn down the light, Connie—lower still—and turn your face away while I whisper to you the terrible secret that has weighed down my soul so long—the dark confession which must be whispered to no ears but yours, as you are most vitally interested. Even my son does not know. Are you listening closely, Connie! and are you sure we are all alone?"

"Yes," whispered the guilty girl; "go on." It was strange that he did not notice it was not Connie's voice. But he did not; his faculties were dimmed by the shadow of death.

Never dreaming of the terrible deception being practised upon him, he spoke quickly, laboriously, and Connie's secret, which he would have guarded with his life, stood revealed to her cruellest foe—the one of all others who would show her no mercy.

Winnie listened as if petrified, and as the last word was spoken, she uttered a piercing, shuddering cry.

CHAPTER VI.

Even the cry that fell from Winnie Kinder's lips failed to betray her identity, yet she could not have repressed it if her life had paid the forfeit.

"Forgive me, little Connie!" murmured the major.

Those were the last words those white lips ever uttered. He fell back upon the pillow—dead.

Quick as thought Winnie snatched the key, which was attached to a slender cord which he had said she would find around his neck, and hiding it in the pocket of her dress fled precipitately from the chamber of death.

She could not go to the old chest now; she must wait for daylight to search among the *débris* of the tower.

She turned, walking hastily in the direction of the library, without stopping to arouse the house with the startling news. The major had

breathed his last—let them discover it when they would.

The sweetest thought in her revengeful heart was the knowledge that Harold Lexmore did not love Connie, and that the betrothal was at the major's instigation.

She had shrewdly gleaned that much from his words.

Connie would have been too artless to have read his words aright. Not so Winnie.

As long as there was no love between them the plan she had marked out for herself would be easier to accomplish.

She knew Harold Lexmore's firm principles and his fine notions of honour, and she knew him well enough to know that, even had he hated Connie, he would carry out to the very letter the vow he had taken upon himself at his father's bedside.

Then through Connie lay her only hope of breaking that solemn betrothal. Fate had put the weapons into her own hands; she knew how to use them.

She reached the library door, and paused hesitatingly on the threshold; for there, seated in one of the cushioned arm-chairs, with his fair, handsome head resting negligently on his arm, was Harold Lexmore himself.

"Harold!" she cried, piteously—her great love for him rushing like a mighty torrent over her heart—"oh, Harold! they have told me what has happened. Oh, my love, look up and tell me that it is not true! If you tell me that we are indeed parted forever I shall go mad! Oh, Harold, my love, say something to comfort me, for my heart is breaking!"

Harold Lexmore raised his white, haggard face from his hands and looked at the girl whom, up to one short hour ago, he had intended to make his bride.

"Don't unman me, Winnie," he cried; "I need all my strength."

He had risen and clasped her in his arms. But his arms fell suddenly away from her; he remembered that he was the betrothed husband of another. His love for Winnie Kinder must ever remain but a memory of the past.

Neither of them saw the crimson velvet hangings of an inner apartment thrust asunder by a little white hand, and a white, startled face peering out at them.

It was Connie. She had fallen asleep in the little curtained alcove, where she had gone to await a summons from the sick-room. The sound of voices awakened her, and drawing the hangings aside, she had glanced out, intending to acquaint whoever it might be of her presence.

But the sight that she saw rooted her to the spot. The curtain fell from her nerveless fingers, shutting her from their view, and she could not have uttered a word to have saved her life. The sight of Winnie Kinder in her lover's arms had been a shock and a terrible revelation to her. The man whom she had loved with all her girlish heart—the man who within that very hour had plighted his troth to her—did not love her. He cared nothing for her; he was Winnie's lover. Why then had he asked her to marry him instead of Winnie?

Her beautiful love-dream had received a terrible blow; her idol was shattered. Now she knew why Harold Lexmore had spoken no word of love to her. He loved Winnie, not her; while she, Heaven help her, had given all the worshipping love of her heart to Winnie's lover.

Like one in a terrible dream, she heard every word they uttered; but all power to move or cry out seemed suddenly to have left her.

"Winnie," he was saying, "do not unman me with your tears. I have no right to kiss them away now, for I— Oh, Winnie, my love, do you realise what has happened? A terrible gulf lies between us now. I, who up to one short hour ago never gave one thought to anyone but you, am now the betrothed husband of another."

"Why did you do it, Harold!" sobbed the girl. "Surely no one could have forced you to utter words you were so far from feeling."

"I cannot tell you why I did it," he answered. "You would not understand, even if I were not bound by a solemn pledge never to reveal why. I feel sorry for myself, more sorry for poor

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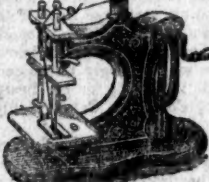
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Connie," he went on, slowly; "for there will never be any pretence of affection between us. I can never love her."

Winnie Kinder knelt sobbingly on the low hassock at his feet.

"Oh, Harold," she cried, tremulously, raising her strange, mesmeric eyes to the young man's pale face, "should we allow this girl to come between us for a mere whim on your father's part—you and me, who love each other so well? It were better far such a betrothal should be broken."

Harold Lexmore shook his head despondently. "Winnie," he said, slowly and hopelessly, "we are pledged to each other as solemnly as vows can bind us. Death alone could break them. Not that I wish poor little Connie's death," he added, hastily, "even though she has ruined your life and mine. I tell you the simple truth; while Connie lives you are lost to me, my darling. Do not look at me with that awful despair in your eyes, my Winnie. There may come a day when I can explain this to you. Oh, if you but knew why I bartered away my love, freedom, and happiness—why it was wrong from my lips—you would pity, but never censure me; I—"

The sentence died on his lips. A low, quivering cry of mortal pain rang through the room; the velvet curtains of the alcove were pushed aside by a white hand trembling like an aspen leaf, and Connie staggered into the room and confronted the lovers.

Winnie Kinder sprang to her feet, white with wrath, her eyes fairly blazing as they rested on the pale face of the beautiful young girl who had come between her and love, luxury, and a princely fortune.

"So you have been listening, playing eaves-dropper, spying upon us, have you, Constance Culver!" she cried, with withering sarcasm. "Well, I am not surprised. A girl so lost to honour as to manoeuvre for a wealthy husband the way you have done, by using your influence with his father to force the son into an unwilling engagement, because he could not well refuse when that father lay on his death-bed, is capable of anything. But it must be one bitter drop of disappointment in your cup of triumph to know that the man you have so cunningly entrapped does not, and never will, love you; for his heart is mine—do you hear, Constance Culver!—his heart is mine!"

Her eyes glittered; her cheeks and lips flushed scarlet with excitement. Harold Lexmore's presence alone prevented her from raising her hand and striking the girl.

For once in his life Harold Lexmore seemed to have been stricken dumb. Connie's sudden appearance rendered him almost incapable of thought or action.

To him Connie turned, holding up her hands as if to ward off Winnie's scathing, burning accusations.

"Mr. Lexmore," she cried out, "oh, believe me, all that she accuses me of is false—all terribly false! I would have died sooner than—than have tried to entrap you into a betrothal with me!"

There was a piteous quiver in the sweet childish voice, and the soft, brown, appealing eyes raised to Harold Lexmore's pale, handsome face were drowned in tears.

He would have interrupted her, but she held up her hand with a quick gesture.

"Hear me out!" she cried. "I have only a few more words to say; but it must be to you alone, Mr. Lexmore. I could not speak before her."

"Winnie," whispered Harold Lexmore, pointing to the drawing-room, "kindly retire there for a few moments while the child speaks. If it pleases her best to speak with me alone, I must not oppose her wish."

"Child!" sneered Winnie Kinder, gathering up her silken skirts. "She is woman enough to plot deeply to secure the heir of Lexmore Hall, as you have seen."

And, with this parting shot, Winnie flounced out of the room.

But when the heavy oaken door was closed behind her she sank down on her knees, and

without the least compunction or delicacy of feeling, applied her ear assiduously to the key-hole; but she could only hear a chance word now and then. She must know, she would know, what Constance Culver had to say.

That was the most awkward moment of Harold Lexmore's life. He placed a chair for Connie, but she waved it away with a gesture of superb pride, as a young queen might have done, and stood before him like a statue carved in marble, her face woefully white and the despair of death in her dark eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Lexmore," she broke out, with a piteous sob; "you must believe that I never thought of—of marrying you up to an hour ago, or I shall go mad with very shame. Poor guardy never mentioned such a subject to me in all his life. I thought when you sent Mrs. Brook, the housekeeper, to tell me you wished me to marry you, I thought—oh, Heaven pity me!—I thought you—you loved me just as dearly as I loved you! Yes, I believed that with all my heart!"

The words she had uttered had fallen upon Harold Lexmore like a thunderbolt; he was literally speechless; the words that fell so thoughtlessly from her lips in her intense excitement were a startling revelation to him.

"I thought—oh, Heaven pity me!—I thought you loved me just as dearly as I loved you!"

He looked up into the beautiful, childish face. Connie loved him! He was fairly dumfounded with surprise; Connie, whom he had considered but a beautiful, wilful, capricious child, had given her heart to him—she loved him, and he had never dreamed of such a possibility, even while he wondered that she had consented to such a strange betrothal; but concluded that she had been lured by the wealth he was to inherit.

He had never thought of associating love with Connie. No wonder he was startled at the revelation that, in the excitement of the moment, sprang from her overcharged heart to her quivering lips.

"Oh, if you had but left me to die among the flames! for it was then that my heart went out to you, and I quite believed that, because you perilled your own life to save mine, you must love me," she went on, pantingly, still holding up her little hand to enjoin silence, her beautiful face pale as the white buds that still clung among her dark curls. "If I had but known you were Winnie's lover, and that for some unknown reason you were forced into this betrothal, I would have died sooner than have entered into it! Oh, I never knew that lips could breathe vows that the heart was far from feeling! Heaven forgive you for pledging yourself to love me, and me only, at poor guardy's bedside, when you knew that every word you uttered was false! You could not, for your heart was Winnie's. That solemn betrothal vow binds us to each other until the death of the one sets the other free, and you must hate me for it. I am going to give you back the freedom you bartered away. I will not spoil your life and Winnie's."

She turned and attempted to pass him, but Harold Lexmore put out his hand and caught the slender, girlish figure.

"How could you set me free, Connie!" he demanded; "what are you intending to do?" "I am going out into the bitterness of death," she replied, freeing herself with a shudder from his detaining clasp. "I am going to set you free!"

And with the swiftness of a storm-driven swallow she sprang through the open door, out on to the lawn, and down the path to the dark, flowing river that lay but a few yards beyond.

(To be continued.)

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FACETIE.

"THE goat," said Jorkins, "is a very intelligent animal." "Yes," assented Dorkins, "I've noticed that he possesses a striking head."

FRIEND: "I suppose the baby is very much attached to his papa?" Mamma: "Extremely. He won't let anyone else walk about the room with him at night."

HE: "Have you heard my new song, 'The Proposal'?" SHE: "No; what key is it in?" HE: "Be mine—er." SHE: "I will. And now you can transpose it to the key of A flat."

"AND did you think for a moment that that clerk of mine was in a position to propose to you?" Daughter: "Why, certainly, papa; he was on his knees."

THE EDITOR: "There, I feel better! I've finished a three-column leader!" The Humorist: "Well, you certainly have got a great weight off your mind."

FUDDY: "So Bender made the opening remarks at the dinner last night. Do you remember what he said?" Duddy: "The opening remarks? Oh, yes. He said, 'Who's got a corkcrew!'"

"WHAT an interesting talker Mr. Gusher is. He always holds one when he speaks," observed Mabel. "Does he? That accounts for the hair I found on his shoulder last night," replied Mrs. Gusher.

"I SEE that a number of gentlemen have organised a 'Homeless Club.' Does that mean that they have no home?" remarked a lady to a neighbour. "No; it only means that they will become less than ever now," was the reply.

HIS WIFE: "And you are to defend that shop-lifter?" Young Barrister: "My dear, she isn't a shoplifter. She may have been formerly, but she has saved so much money in the last ten years that she has become a kleptomaniac."

SHE: "It's no use, Mr. Slimly. In my present state of mind I would not accept the most attractive man in the world." HE: "No, I see you won't; but at any rate you will have the satisfaction of knowing that he has offered himself."

SHE: "Does my refusal really pain you?" HE: "Yes, it does. I was so sure you would say 'Yes.' I actually wagered £10,000 that you would marry me." SHE: "£10,000! Well, I was only joking. When shall it be, dear?"

"HEAR about the awful pickle Jones is in!" "No; what's up?" "Why, he bought a parrot, thinking it might teach his children to talk." "And did it?" "Did it? I'll tell you what, Jones is trying to find something that will un-teach the child every word used by the parrot."

MISS OLDER: "Men must be growing more polite. I get seats in crowded omnibuses more often than I did a few years ago." Miss Cutting (who bears a grudge against her): "Well, it's a very boorish man who will let an old lady stand!"

"I SAY, Sambo, where did you git dose shirt-studs?" "In de shop, to be sure." "Yah, you just told me you had no money." "Dat's right." "How did you git dem den?" "Well, I saw on a card in de window, 'Collar Studs,' so I went in and collared dem."

"WHAT'S the gloaming, Uncle Tom?" "Well, before a man is married it is the time to take a walk with the girl he loves; but after he is married it is the time he falls over rocking-horses and building-blocks on the sitting-room floor."

"I WISH I could think of something to keep my husband at home at night." "Get him a bicycle." "That would take him out more than ever." "Oh, no, it wouldn't! My husband got one the day before yesterday, and the doctor says he won't be out for a month."

HOTEL MANAGER: "I see you have given our best suite of rooms to a man named Wiggins. Are you sure he can pay the price?" Hotel Clerk: "Yes, sir; he is immensely rich." "How do you know?" "Oh, he is very old and very ugly, and his wife is very young and very pretty."

"DID you ever stop to think, my love," said Mr. Micawber, gazing at his plate of lobster salad, "that the things we love most in this life are the very things that never agree with us?" "Will you be so kind, Micawber," said Mrs. Micawber, straightening up, "as to tell me whether you are speaking of the salad or of me, sir?"

SLANDERED HIM: "So many people tell me that you are fast, Lionel," she declared, in dulcet tones, "but I know better." "How good of you." "It's only the truth, Lionel, for you are positively slow. It's two years since you began devoting yourself to me, and yet you have not reached a definite proposal."

"Yes," said the meek-looking man, "I've no doubt you've had some great hunting experience in your travels abroad." "I have, indeed." "Buffalo-hunting?" "Yes." "And bear-hunting?" "Of course." "Well, you just come around and let my wife take you house-hunting, and bargain-hunting with her. Then you'll begin to know what excitement is."

CHEEKY UNDERGRADUATE: "Professor, what's the reason a man can't scorch up-hill on a bicycle?" Professor: "Why, it seems ridiculous to ask such a question as that. The mere fact that—in short, the obvious absurdity of the thing—implying, as it does, such dense ignorance, of the simplest of Nature's laws—there would appear to be—"

Cheeky Undergraduate (much disgusted): "Oh, well, I've lost—that's clear. I bet you could explain it." SHE was white and apparently lifeless, but after the doctor had made a hasty examination he said there was still hope. Her clothing had almost been torn off her; her hair was dishevelled and there were many bruises upon her limbs. At last she opened her eyes and murmured,—"Where am I?" "You are safe," they said to her. Then she raised one of her hands. Her purse was still clenched tightly, and she gave a long sigh of relief. This happened on the morning that Lace and Remnants marked all their two-shilling dress materials down to 1s. 11½d. a yard.

As the villagers were reported to have relapsed into sin the clergyman determined to give them a good shaking up, and enlarged eloquently on the horrible torments awaiting the wicked. Wishing to test the effect he had produced, he called upon a toothless old gossip. "Now my good woman," said he, "I hope my sermon has borne good fruit in your mind. You heard what I had to say about hell fire—that place where there shall be walling and gnashing of teeth?" "Well," said the hardened old dame, "if I 'as to say anything it be this, 'Let them naah 'em as 'as 'em.'"

At a Liverpool restaurant an Englishman was complaining to an American of the muddiness of the streets of New York. "Waal," observed the American, "I dare say there may be some mud in our streets, but it does seem to me that in the matter of mud you can give us points every time. I was walking down your Bold-street this afternoon, and I noticed that the mud did seem fairly thick. Presently I saw a top-hat come swimming round on the mud. So I just gave it a poke with my stick, when an old gentleman looked up—kind of surprised at my attention—from underneath. I allowed he was pretty deep in. 'Oh, that's nothing,' he said; 'I'm on the top of an omnibus!'"

THE wind blew fresh and strong across the links. It also sent the locks of the young woman who played golf flurrying over her brown cheeks. Attenuated, forsooth, was Algernon De Brassay, and fair as some marsh blue flower was Gwendoline Niblick. "Gwen," said the young man, gazing along the velvety turf, "I would that other links than those we tread might bind me in life's great game." Gwendoline Niblick gave a quick start. A blush suffused her face, and her lips parted in surprise. She looked at the young man at her side, whose beardless countenance looked pleadingly into her laughing eyes. "I'm sorry, Algy," she said, gravely. "I'm afraid you do not suit me to a tee."

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SOCIETY.

EARLY in July the Duke and Duchess of Eife will go to Duff House, Banffshire, for a few weeks before proceeding to Deal for the shooting season.

THE new sets of harness which have been manufactured for the Queen's team of cream-coloured horses on June 22nd, will be Royal purple in colour, and heavily mounted with silver-gilt decorations, in which the lion and the unicorn will be very prominent.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz will stay in England until the middle of July, and are to spend the Whitsuntide holidays at Kew with the Duke of Cambridge. On leaving London the Grand Duke will proceed to Ostend, and afterwards to Hamburg.

EACH of the Queen's Jubilee guests from abroad will have to be attended by a member of one of the Royal Households, and the services of all the lords, grooms, and equerries in ordinary, and of the whole of the gentlemen-ushers are to be requisitioned. The Prince of Wales's lords and equerries will also have to undertake special duty.

QUEEN MARGHERITA has just presented Princess Hélène, her handsome daughter-in-law, with a beautiful bicycle, enclosed in a very chic case lined with the richest red plush. The machine weighs twenty-two pounds, the frame is richly gilded, and the handle-bar of ivory is ornamented with the Royal Arms of the House of Savoy.

THE Duke of Oporto is to represent his brother, the King of Portugal, at the Jubilee, and will arrive in London on the 21st inst. from Paris, en route from Lisbon. The late King Consort of Portugal was a first cousin of the Queen and of Prince Albert, his Majesty having been a son of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, brother of the Duchess of Kent and of the late King of the Belgians, who married the wealthy Princess of Kohary.

PRINCE FRANCIS JOSEPH, who was recently married to Princess Anne of Montenegro, will come with his bride to England in July or August for some time, while next winter is to be spent by them at St. Petersburg. It is believed that Prince Francis Joseph will be offered a lucrative and dignified post under the Russian Government. He is a great favourite with both the Emperor and Empress, and also with his cousins the Grand Duke Serge and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth.

THE Queen has so many inspections, receptions, and other formal functions during the Jubilee week that it has been found necessary to postpone the Buckingham Palace garden party from Wednesday June 23rd, until Monday the 28th. On Wednesday the Queen is to hold two Courts at Buckingham Palace, one for the Houses of Parliament, and the other for the Mayors and Provosts, and in the evening her Majesty will return to Windsor. The result of the change of programme will be that the Queen will pay an additional visit to London, as her Majesty is to come up from Windsor for two hours on Monday afternoon for the garden party. The dates of the State Ball and State Concert are not yet positively fixed, but the Queen's great banquet at Windsor (in St. George's Hall) will take place on Friday the 25th, and most of the Royalties from abroad are to sleep at the Castle on that night, proceeding direct from Windsor to Portsmouth on Saturday morning for the naval review at Spithead.

ONE of the most effective features of the Jubilee at Windsor will be a grand torchlight procession by the Eton College boys, who will march through the two towns up to the Quadrangle at the Castle, and there go through evolutions of a striking character, as they did in 1887. A general public torchlight procession is also to be organised. Another important event will be an aquatic fête, with illuminations at night. Efforts are being made to carry this item out on a large scale by the various boating clubs.

STATISTICS.

AMONG English people dark-brown hair is more than twice as common as hair of any other shade.

EUROPE has four times as many cities as it had when the Queen came to the throne, and the United States fourteen times as many.

DURING the present century the floods of the Yellow River, in China, have caused the loss of 11,000,000 lives.

A COMPARISON of the average height of men in various trades and professions in different countries brings out the fact that the English, as a nation, are the tallest men in the world. It has been found that the English professional classes, who are the tallest adult males, average 5ft. 9½ in. Next on the list come the males of all classes of the United States. Most European nations average for the adult male 5ft. 5 in., but the Austrians, Spaniards, and Portuguese fall a trifle short of this standard.

GEMS.

SO many good services; sweet remembrances will grow from them.

WHAT men want is not talent, it is purpose; in other words, not the power to achieve, but the will to labour.

GENEROUSITY, to deserve the name, comprises the desire and the effort to benefit others, without reference to self.

DRUDGERY is as necessary to call out the treasures of the mind as harrowing and planting those of the earth.

CHARACTER is measured by the distance travelled from the starting point, and everything depends upon whether the progress has been up stream or down.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MAPLE BISCUITS.—Into an ordinary biscuit dough a quantity of maple sugar, broken into small bits, is mixed, the dough then rolled out, cut into small biscuits, and baked as usual.

NUT CAKES.—Beat one egg well, add to it half an ounce of sifted sugar, one ounce of warmed butter, one tablespoonful of yeast, half a teaspoonful of lukewarm milk and half a saltspoonful of salt. Whip all well together; then stir in by degrees half a pound of flour. Beat it until it falls from the spoon, then set it to rise. When it has risen, cut from the light dough little pieces the size of a walnut, and without moulding or kneading, fry them light brown in boiling fat. When done lay on a napkin to absorb fat.

LIVER ROLLS.—This makes a splendid breakfast dish. It can be prepared the previous night, and quickly heated the following morning. Have the butcher cut a pound of calf's liver into medium-thick slices and a half-pound of breakfast bacon as thin as possible. Scald the liver, then drain and wipe dry. Put a slice of bacon on each slice of liver, roll and tie (not too tight) with soft cord. Put two slices of the bacon in a frying-pan with two tablespoonfuls of cold water; as soon as the water evaporates allow the fat to fry out of the bacon. Dust the rolls with flour, put them into the bacon fat and shake them over the fire until they are nicely browned, then lift them into a saucepan. Put a tablespoonful of butter and two tablespoonfuls of flour into the frying-pan, mix well and let them brown. Pour in a pint of hot water and when it boils strain it over the rolls; add one slice of onion, a bay leaf, an even teaspoonful of salt, and a quarter of a teaspoonful of white pepper; cover and simmer gently for an hour. They are now ready to serve but will be all the better for soaking over night in the sauce. Next morning heat quickly and serve with baked potatoes.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia have sent to the Queen a magnificent set of emeralds as a Jubilee present.

THE average of human life is now being added to at the rate of nearly ten years each century.

THE tooth of a mastodon in an almost complete state of preservation has been unearthed. It weighed 14 lb. 12 oz., and measured ten inches by six, and is pure ivory.

THE crater of Mauna Loa, in the Sandwich Islands, the largest volcano in the world, is twenty miles in diameter. Sometimes the stream of lava flowing from it is fifty miles long.

WHEN lions and tigers are born in captivity the greatest care has to be exercised to keep them for several days in the dark and undisturbed, as otherwise the mothers will almost invariably destroy them.

PERFUME warming-pans are used in some of the country mansions in France. When guests remain over night, the host endeavours to discover the scent each prefers, and thus the sheets are impregnated with heliotrope, rose, lily, or other desired perfume.

IN Mexico the children in schools who have done well are permitted to smoke cigars while pursuing their lessons. The effect upon a stranger when he enters a class and finds a number of the youngsters bending over their books and smoking a "weed" is rather startling.

PERHAPS no country in the world is better suited for the cyclist than Holland, where you may run for miles on miles without meeting with an incline that even suggests a hill. In The Hague cycling is a universal amusement, horse exercise for ladies being the occasional exception.

THE latest fire-lighter consists of a fan driven by a spring and enclosed in a box, from the bottom of which runs a narrow channel containing asbestos. Paraffin oil is poured on to the asbestos, lighted, and a small lever pulled. A strong current of air drives the flame into the coals, and a brilliant fire results in a few minutes.

THE mosaic work with which the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral is paved was made by the female convicts at Woking Prison. The quarries of the Isle of Portland supplied the materials for St. Paul's Cathedral, and for all the most splendid buildings in London. About 70,000 tons of Portland stone are now exported annually from these quarries.

THAT the eagle has a most wonderful power of vision is shown from the fact that it flies in almost a straight line for any object which it desires to secure. Baby eagles also possess this far-sightedness. Long before human eyes can discern them, their gaze is fixed on distance, and their cries of welcome to their parents are shrill and continuous. The structure of their eyes make them peculiarly strong. The brightest glare of sunlight does not affect them. Eagles do not fly as high in the air as some other birds, but their flight is very long and steady. A peculiarity about eagles is that they are constant to their mates, not changing every season, as most birds do. Sometimes the same pair of eagles will return to the same nest year after year. They seem to become acquainted with the locality, and, if they are not disturbed, are regular tenants.

WE have often been asked by our lady readers to recommend a suitable present for a gentleman. It is always a difficult matter to select an article that will prove both acceptable and useful to the recipient, but, should an occasion arise when you are in doubt what to give, we should say unreservedly, let it be a Swan Fountain Pen manufactured by Messrs. Maber, Todd and Bard, of Chislehurst, London. This firm has the reputation for the past fifty years as the makers of gold pens of the highest degree of excellence. Write for their illustrated price list, which will be sent post-free.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

K. C.—Addresses are never given.

P.G.—No; bread is largely made by machinery.

BEAT.—The nationality of the child is English.

B. B.—Let them alone; do not interfere with it.

H. L.—You cannot detain the goods for money due for board.

INTERESTED.—We have not space to give the necessary directions.

TROUBLED.—Have them carefully looked to by a skillful surgeon.

NINA.—The one remedy for the spotting of your dress is to dye it.

CARL.—There are several spellings; hardly two dictionaries agree.

P. C.—Ruecia declared war against Turkey on April 24th, 1877.

REDOLPH.—Gibraltar is spoken of as "the key of the Mediterranean."

CURIOUS.—Probably it is frosted on one side only; this is often done.

PUZZLED.—These are matters which everyone must decide for himself.

ALF.—You had better state the case to a lawyer before taking proceedings.

NERVOUS.—It was perfectly legal, and as binding as if it had been performed in a church.

WILLIAM.—It is seven and a half years since the German Emperor came to the throne.

C. M.—If the goods are of your own manufacture, you can travel and sell them without a license.

CONSTANT READER.—A gentleman might with perfect propriety wear gloves at afternoon church service.

V. C.—If he can procure a permanent situation before resigning his present post, no such risk is incurred.

JACOB.—A great many persons think that rubbing vaseline on the face will increase the growth of the beard.

KATHIE.—Silk handkerchiefs and ribbons should be washed in salt and water, and ironed wet, to obtain the best results.

DOUBTFUL.—There might be occasions and conditions where it would be proper, but they would be quite exceptional.

GAUCHE.—If the courtesy is offered by a gentleman who is unknown to her, she should kindly but firmly decline the politeness.

WORKING.—The "burr" which you seem to have is rather a matter of habit, and may be overcome, like stammering, by careful training.

JACK TAN.—The depth of water has a considerable influence on the speed of steamers, which are found to move more slowly in shallow water.

SCOOLOOY.—The moon is much closer to the earth at certain times than at others, the greatest difference in the distance being about 26,000 miles.

P. Y.—If the son becomes chargeable to the parish the father can then be called upon for a contribution towards his maintenance in the workhouse.

B. E.—Every living person, if he makes the estimate, will discover that his ancestors in the twentieth generation numbered over one million people.

IN A MESS.—If either party is under twenty-one years of age, he or she is not bound by the promise to marry, and cannot be sued for breach of promise.

E. M.—Much will depend upon the apparent ability of the lad; something also on the recommendations as to character which he is able to produce to the owners.

O. B.—Castor-oil plants growing in pots placed about the room are said to drive them away, and are very decorative plants and easily grown if you get the right sort.

AMBITIOUS.—With a good instructor and a full hour's practice daily, you should be able, after your three years' study, to play the simpler violin compositions acceptably.

ELLA.—The dust may be taken off the gilt frames with a sponge made damp with warm spirits of wine, but gilt can be renewed only by having a new coat of metal applied.

BEYS.—Have the eyes examined by a specialist in the treatment of diseases of that organ, and after strictly following his directions, the chances are greatly in favour of recovery.

SUPERSTITIONS.—The horseshoe superstition dates very far back. In the latter half of the seventeenth century most of the houses of the west end of London were protected by horseshoes.

Y. K.—Crete is inhabited by 300,000 Greeks, of whom 80,000 are Moslems. It has only three large towns, Oanea, Candia, and Retimo, with 23,000, 14,000 and 8,000 inhabitants respectively.

ELLEN.—Strong soap and water will clean alabaster in ordinary cases, but if much stained it may be treated with dilute muriatic acid, or let it be covered with a paste of quicklime and water to be allowed to remain on all day, then to be washed off with soap and water.

S. E.—If you cannot reconcile yourself to such a match, it would be best to inform the gentleman, and thus release him from an intended union with one who would do him but little honour.

F. F.—In ordinary times all Greeks capable of bearing arms up to the age of forty can be enlisted in the army; and in periods of war all citizens must serve from eighteen to fifty years of age.

HILDA.—During the wedding ceremony, the bride takes off the glove of her left hand and gives it to the first bridesmaid to hold, in order that she may have the wedding-ring placed upon her finger.

RUPERT.—There is a wild flower in Turkey which is the exact floral image of a humming-bird. The breast is green, the wings are a deep rose colour, the throat yellow, the head and back almost black.

BETSY JANE.—Whenever vegetables put up in tin cans are opened and only partly used, do not allow the remainder to stand in the tin, but turn them out into an earthen bowl and put in a cool place.

TOM.—A man need offer no apology or ask permission of the lady under his escort if he chooses to offer his seat to another lady who is standing, nor should lady No. 1 expect it, or question his right to do it.

IGNORAMUS.—Read the standard works written by Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, Spencer, Miller, Bulwer, Milton, Tennyson, Dryden, Longfellow, Holmes, and Whittier, and thus become acquainted with the highest class of literature.

IN THE OLD FAMILIAR WAY.

Turn the light a little low,
Choose the handiest room you can;
On your knees you'll have to go
If you do it like a man.

Cultivate an anxious look,
Let a sigh your fear betray;
She will read you like a book
In the old familiar way.

Gently take her little hand,
Softly touch it with a kiss;
Disregard her reprimand—
Every girl behaves like this.

Tell her that you love her more
Than mere words can ever convey;
Swear you're never loved before—
'Tis the old familiar way.

She will blush—a teardrop shed
(Better than mere proxy "Yes"):
You will almost lose your head
At this added loveliness.

Recognise her mute consent,
Rise and to her boldly say:
"May I then own your love consent
In the old familiar way?"

As your lips in kisses meet,
Prize her brother's laugh you'll hear;
She will vow you're indiscreet—
Wash like that you need not fear.

Never mind the tales he'll hatch—
Boys grow older every day;
Prize your younger him will catch
In the old familiar way.

R. G.—Finely powdered pumice-stone and vinegar. Wash the surface with this, and leave it on for several hours; then brush it hard and wash it clean with water. When dry, rub with whitening and wash-leather.

A. N.—The colour of amber is of all shades, from pale straw to deep orange. A species called the Falerian, from its similarity in colour to the celebrated rich, golden wine of that name, was the most prized by the Romans.

CURIOUS.—Because the only clue to the author in the first editions was the mention, "By the Author of 'Waverley.'" "Waverley," the first of the novels, was published anonymously, and for years the author's identity was maintained.

J. B.—It will be better to take him to a dentist and get the worst removed while the others are either filed or stopped; until this is done you should be careful to have his mouth rubbed twice or three times daily with camphorated chalk.

ANNOYED.—Sometimes the hairs can be rubbed out with pumice-stone and water, obtainable from a colour-man; that splits the hair and uproots it; dispartories are more or less dangerous; one who uses them can never be certain of escaping without unpleasant scars.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Until children are six or seven years old they should have twelve hours' sleep every night. In addition to this a nap of two hours, either in the morning or afternoon—especially in hot weather—will do a great deal toward keeping them bright and well.

BELLA.—Mirage is a phenomenon extremely common at sea in certain localities, especially in high latitudes, and sometimes also witnessed on land, particularly in Lower Egypt, Persia, Tartary, the western plains of America, and on the margins of rivers or lakes, or on the seashore.

HOUSEWIFE.—To restore the elasticity of the seats of a cane chair, turn over the chair and with hot water and a sponge wash the cane-work so that it may be thoroughly soaked. If the cane-work is badly soiled, use a little soap. Dry in the air, and it will be as good as new.

B. C.—Very little money is required to stock a shop, and the stock is of a kind that should sell readily enough when temptingly set out in thickly populated locality. Keep your shop clean and fresh, putting as much variety into your wares as possible, and you ought to succeed.

V. V.—The familiar "Brazil nut" grows in hard, spherical pods, each of which contains from eighteen to twenty-four of the triangular seeds that come to market. So beautifully are they packed by Nature, that no man yet has ever been able to put them back in their receptacle after once they have been taken out.

PHIL.—Man is the only animal that has a real nose or chin. Horses have faces that are all nose, swine have snouts, and elephants trunks; lions have vast smelling organs, but none of them anything that can be separated from their faces, and called a nose. It is even more true of the chin, which is particularly human.

OLD READER.—The boys are placed out at farms, mostly in Manitoba; they are visited periodically by those who take them out, and are trained to agricultural service, so that in a few years they may take up farms for themselves if they like, or return home to service in this country; they become for the time being member of the farmer's family.

RUTHIE.—The stain may be removed by wiping it with a sponge dipped in pure turpentine oil or benzine, removing the excess at once with blotting paper; then sponge with warm, soapy water. But you have not told us what the material is, and we cannot promise that the process will not injure the dye so as to make quite as bad a stain as you remove.

SPAIN.—If the stain is recent, spirits of turpentine laid on with a sponge or brush, and wiped out with a sponge or brush, and wiped out with a piece of white rag held under, and another held in the hand for rubber, ought to do it with care, but if it is old and hardened, use olive oil or butter to soften the paint, and when softened proceed with the turpentine.

V. W.—The lime in which your eggs are to be preserved is just builder's plaster lime thinned down to the consistency of oatmeal porridge; a quantity is poured into a barrel, a row of eggs set in it end up, then more lime and more eggs in alternate layers, until within two inches of the top, which must be filled with lime.

SUN ROSA.—As a rule the public press has done all in its power to promote the welfare of women by suggesting new fields of employment and encouraging them in every well-considered effort to take leading parts in the great drama of life. We have failed to see any attempt made to resist their advance except in the way of suffrage, and that is a question upon which they themselves are not agreed.

ALICIA.—Take a stale loaf of cake; cut off the top and scoop out the inside, leaving the bottom and sides of the cake about one or one and a half inches thick. Place the crumbs thus removed into a dish, add a cupful of raspberry jam and sufficient rich, boiled custard so that the mixture will fill the cake case. Replace the cover and set away until needed, in a cold place. Serve with boiled custard poured over it and whipped cream.

UNHAPPY FRED.—Very few parents are willing to surrender their daughters to the care of men who have no reasonable or apparent prospect of being able to take care of them. If, at the age of twenty-three, you have never settled down, you must take yourself well in hand and completely change your habits of life. When you have accomplished something worth while, probably you will not have to overcome the mother's dislike.

HANNAH.—Scald cage, and prick at end of spar with solution of fir-tree oil; wash bird with solution of four ounces quassia chips soaked two hours in half-pint cold water, to which add two ounces methylated spirits before applying; dry parrot carefully with cloth at once before a good fire; let canary-seed be main food; give Indian corn boiled, oats or barley, raw, for variety, or some flower-seed occasionally; but lettuce, groundel or chickweed freely, or a little fruit occasionally; crusts and milk are too heating; no butcher meat at any time; watch for insects.

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